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**Stuckism, Punk Attitude and Fine
Art Practice: parallels and
similarities.**

Paul Arthur Harvey

PhD

2011

Stuckism, Punk Attitude and Fine Art Practice: parallels and similarities.

Paul Arthur Harvey

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements of the
University of Northumbria at Newcastle
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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Arts and Social Sciences

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Abstract

My doctoral project, researched between 2006 And 2011, asks if the rapidly expanding art movement known as Stuckism has an approach that can be related to Punk 'attitude' in the late 1970s. Theorists of youth-based subcultures have extensively explored the notion of generational attitude (Hebdige 1979, Sabin, 1999) and the ambition of this PhD has been, from the start, to describe the development of Stuckism in terms associated with the rise of Punk within my own generation. As an active member of the original Stuckist group I have had to engage with the same sense of iconoclastic hostility that played such an important role during my time as a Punk musician from 1977 to the present. Thus the research I discuss in this thesis has been shaped by a set of aims and objectives that, firstly, address the similarities and parallels between two distinct historical moments and, secondly, embrace the fact that I am undertaking my research from within the subject group as it coheres into a viable force in the international arts scene.

The parallel between Punk and Stuckism may not be immediately obvious for historians or critics. Both are separated in time as distinct episodes in our current cultural story (Bech Poulson, 2005; Evans, 2000) and both are associated with different art forms that address contrasting socio-cultural audiences. Whilst Punk operated, first and foremost, in the context of popular music, Stuckism is a creature of the visual arts, a response to dominant trends amongst gallery and museum directors rather than an appeal to radicalized, media-oriented youth. However, I am not able to examine this contrast from a retrospective point of view and so have built my

methodological approach on the hope that the 'narrative turn' in contemporary social studies and cultural anthropology (Marcus & Fischer, 1984) offers me a persuasive mechanism for capturing the ongoing development of my practice as a painter with Stuckist and Punk affiliations. As my creative activities have contributed to the idea of Stuckism I have explored how the narratives of identity I associate with Punk attitude have helped form the identity of the group. Here my initial model was research on the narrative construction of identity in professional or social domains described by Czarniawska (2004). However, as I accumulated and published accounts of Stuckism using my growing archive of interviews with other artists in the group (Lynn, 2006) I began to use methodological procedures suggested by Ochs & Capps (2001) to develop a system of interpretation that drew out, I felt, many commonalities with the Punk movement.

As a result, my thesis both describes and debates the relevance of Stuckist practice within contemporary art. At the time of writing, the movement, although prominent within media circles, is barely represented in terms of serious and considered debate, whereas Punk is, in many ways, over represented. My ultimate ambition has been to address this situation.

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David Muggleton helped me to appreciate the importance of looking back in the right way, and how important it was to reconsider long accepted assumptions about what happened to me a long time ago.

I am also in gratitude to Russell Bestley, whom I met at a particularly difficult period for me in the writing up. Russell reaffirmed my faith both in my research and in Punk, although I'm still not quite as convinced as him about the 1982-84 period.

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I owe so much to Pauline Murray and Robert Blamire for giving me the opportunity to play music with authentic punks. It has been a blast.

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Finally I thank Carol, who has had to put up with me during the five years of this research project, and has had to accept that everything I have watched, read, listened to, experienced and discussed, in my head related to my research, and subsequently I had to start talking about it.

Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others.

Ethical clearance was not required for this research by the School Ethics Committee. Consent forms have been completed and signed by all conversational partners who have contributed to this research.

Paul Harvey

Signature:

Date:

Foreword – *Dramatis Personae*

In order for the reader to navigate my thesis I begin with a list of the people I contacted, held conversations with, and then cited in the following chapters. In all, twenty-eight individuals with direct experience of either Stuckism or Punk contributed to my research as conversational partners within thirty-seven taped sessions. Some met with me individually, others joined group discussions. The conversations I organized in 2004 were archived on mini DV tapes and all but one (with Charles Thomson) of the discussions held after 2006 were recorded on an Olympus digital voice recorder (WS-320M) and archived as Windows media files. Alongside my review of the literature associated with British subcultures, this documentation represents the core source material of my doctoral project and I here provide a short introduction to the range of people I spoke with.

Twelve of the conversations were with the poet and painter **Charles Thomson**, co-founder of the Stuckist movement. These sessions took place at Thomson's home in East Finchley, London, between January 2007 and June 2010. I had one conversation with the poet and musician **Billy Childish**, the other founder member, in a busy café just off Farringdon Road in London in April 2008. That evening Childish performed at the Aquarium Gallery on Farringdon Road and very kindly dedicated a poem to me (a limited-edition double vinyl album of this performance has been subsequently published by the Aquarium Gallery).

Of the thirteen London Stuckists, I originally focused my research on painters who had remained actively Stuckist – **Bill Lewis**, **Ella Guru**, **Philip Absolon**, and **Joe Machine** I had already met in 2004. I met **Ella Guru** again in 2011. However, I also found it useful to talk to artists who left the movement. For example, I met **Wolf Howard** twice: once as a Stuckist and once as a former member (Sun and Doves pub, Coldharbour Lane, London, 14.4.08). Guru's husband **Sexton Ming**, originally one of the thirteen London Stuckists, left the group in 2008. He declined to be a conversational partner in 2004 but agreed to meet in 2011 on the understanding that we would not discuss Stuckism. This was useful because we talked about his experiences as a Punk in Gravesend, Kent.

In 2009 I travelled to the Czech Republic to meet the art historian **Robert Janás** who leads the Prague Stuckists, and one of the members, **Jiří Hauschka**. The conversations I had with **Janás** and **Hauschka** informed my research although I have not directly quoted from our discussions. A more recent conversational partner from 2011, **Mark D**, was the first serious collector of Stuckist artworks. He was excited by the movement and, having begun to paint himself, now regularly contributes to Stuckist exhibitions. **Edgeworth Johnstone** and **Shelley Li** are members of The Other Muswell Hill Stuckists, a group formed by Johnstone in 2006 after reading the Stuckist manifestos. I must also acknowledge a useful conversation with **Jasmine Maddock**, a Stuckist from Merseyside, who I met at Thomson's house in February 2011.

My research explores the idea that Stuckism has many similarities with the attitude of provincial Punk in the late 1970s and my conversational partners also included musicians who were active in the movement. **Pauline Murray** was a founder member of *Penetration*, 'one of the first and best punk groups from outside of London'. (Savage, 2009, p. 631) *Penetration* was formed in 1976 in Ferryhill, a small village in County Durham. The band went on to play The Roxy, the only punk venue in London in early 1977, and, having signed with Virgin Records, maintained a successful career until 1979 when they split during an American tour. (I joined Murray as a guitarist in her solo activities as *Pauline Murray and the Storm* in 1985). *Penetration* is considered the archetypal provincial punk band not only because they came from a small village, but also because they were 'Northern'. Murray met with me for two conversations at Newcastle's Polestar Rehearsal Rooms in 2009.

After leaving art school in Torquay in the late 1970s, the singer **TV Smith** (converation on 29.3.08, London) formed *The Adverts*, one of the earliest British bands to be recognised as performing Punk music (they were notorious for supposedly not being able to play their instruments). *The Adverts* worked in London but were not involved in the Kings Road scene that has dominated the official history of British Punk. This independence from the metropolitan story of Punk made Smith an obvious choice as a conversational partner and I met with him in February 2009. **Davy Henderson** was a member of post-Punk group *The Fire Engines*, who worked out of Edinburgh between 1979 and 1981. I met Henderson in Newcastle in March 2010, when

his current band, *The Sexual Objects*, was performing at the Star and Shadow cinema.

In 2010 I decided to extend my conversational research to academics working on the theoretical analysis of Punk subculture. **David Muggleton**, who I met at a Holborn pub in December 2010, was an obvious choice because he had openly discussed his time as a Punk. He had also played bass in a Punk band. I was also interested in Muggleton because he had experimented with narrative inquiry in his study of subcultures. Muggleton was kind enough to point me in the direction of **Russell Bestley**, with whom I had a very useful conversation at the London College of Communication in October 2011. Bestley's PhD on provincial Punk was entitled *Hitsville UK: Punk Rock And Graphic Design In The Faraway Towns, 1976-84* (2007).

One of the most unexpected contacts I made during my research was related to **Peter Hames'** book *The Czech New Wave* (2005). Hames, now an Honorary Research Associate in film and media studies at Staffordshire University was probably responsible for introducing me to these extraordinary films for the first time when I was an art student at this institution (then known as North Staffordshire Polytechnic) in the late 1970s and early 1980s. I arranged a conversation with Hames at his home in Leek, Staffordshire, in August 2009. In the same way that I was forced to edit my conversations with the Prague Stuckists from this thesis, I also did not have room to write about the Czech background to my early involvement in Punk even though my

discussions with Hames uncovered some of earliest interests as a visual artist (see appendix iv).

Ann Bukantas was the co-curator, with Charles Thomson, of *The Stuckists Punk Victorian* show at Liverpool Museums in 2004. I had originally wanted to interview Bukantas for my MA essay in 2005 but she was too busy working on her next project. From April to September 2010 we engaged in an email correspondence in which Bukantas responded, not from her personal perspective, but as an official representative of the National Museums, Liverpool. Given that my research has been primarily concerned with autoethnographic reflections on Stuckism and Punk, this institutional narrative was not quite what I was looking for although, as can be seen in appendix v, Bukantas lent insights into the controversy that surrounded that exhibition.

I studied with the painter and graphic artist **Chris Reynolds** from 1979 to 1982 at North Staffordshire Polytechnic. As a conversational partner, Reynolds was able to reflect back to me what it has been to be an artist exploring a commitment to Punk attitude. I met with Reynolds at my home in Whitley Bay in August 2010.

Andrew McNiven, who I met for a discussion in March 2009 at his home in the Scottish Borders, and **David Dye** (meeting on 29.7.09 at my home in Whitley Bay) represent different generations of the art school graduates who helped shape the current art scene in Britain. McNiven studied fine art from 1984 to 1987 at Goldsmiths College in London where he was a contemporary

of many of the Young British Artists (yBas) who rose to international prominence during the 1990s. Dye was a student at St. Martins College of Art from 1969 to 1972 and rose to prominence as a highly experimental installation artist during the 1970s. Until his retirement from Northumbria University in 2010, Dye was a member of my supervisory team. McNiven and Dye provided valuable access to the historical context that Thomson rejects through his antipathy to the yBas.

Like myself, **Hiroko Oshima** is a painter working within an artist's group, in her case the *Ryu* (meaning 'wing') based in Kagawa, in the northeast of Japan. Our conversations, which took place in March 2009, were focussed on the issues that arise when artists join together to pursue social and cultural goals. Oshima provided me with contextual thinking about my relationship with the Stuckists.

Sir Nicolas Serota, director of the Tate and archenemy of the Stuckists, was invited to enter into a conversation with me in October 2010. Despite receiving a positive response I am still waiting to secure a date.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Nostalgia for an age yet to come



Fig 1: the author in 1977

In December 1976, I heard *Anarchy in the UK*, the first single by the Punk group The Sex Pistols, and my life changed forever. I became a Punk.

I very quickly formed a Punk band, having already bought my first amplifier from Woolworths. I read about Punk in the New Musical Express, and traveled to the Kings Hall in Derby to watch Punk bands. I also decided to go to Art

College, as I wanted to make art and play Punk. Once Punk hit, the idea of getting a job was not an option.

I had grown up listening to and loving popular music. By the summer of 1977 I had developed the concept, along with my immediate circle, that anything Punk was good, and anything else was bad. Tunnel vision was an element of my learning, and this quickly led to finding others in the town whom shared this philosophy. Sometimes it was hard to find out whether bands were Punk or not so we didn't know whether to like them: Ultravox (heavily influenced by Roxy Music, a pre Punk glam group influenced by Pop Art) for example, and XTC (although they didn't sound or look Punk, they might be Punk because they played the Hope and Anchor, a popular pub venue in London for Punk bands, and were on the double live album released from the venue). It was ok though to like bands that were not Punk if Punks said they liked them. Andy Medhurst in his piece *What Did I Get?* from the book *Punk Rock: So What?* shares this experience: 'It was ok to have three Van Der Graf Generator albums because Johnny Rotten said he liked their singer Peter Hammill.' (Medhurst, 1999, p. 221)

A willful sense of anger was an element to being a Punk. Clark acknowledges this when he references Cullen (1996) and states, 'At the heart of early Punk was calculated anger. (Cullen 1996: 249) It was anger at the establishment and anger at the allegedly soft rebellion of the hippie counterculture: anger, too, at the commodification of rock and roll.' (Clark, 2003, p. 225)

The heavy-rock band *Led Zeppelin*, were the enemy. The Punks hated the hippies. Before Punk, popular musicians had had an almost God like status (Eric Clapton's nickname was, in fact, God). Making a record was a deeply mystical process. Progressive rock (a popular type of rock music pre-Punk) encouraged this thinking, and often consisted of the following ideas and concepts:

1. lengthy songs (often a whole side of an album)
2. a significant number of changes of pace and rhythm
3. technically proficient playing and singing
4. long instrumental solos that included not just guitar and keyboards but also bass and drum solos
5. obtuse lyrics that told stories far removed from our experiences in everyday life. They were often obscure and sometimes fantastical. A common approach was to base a series of songs around the same theme, hence the 'concept' album.

I bought a Led Zeppelin record, but I didn't identify with it, as it said nothing to me about my life. The thought of actually playing music onstage at that level

seemed impossibly remote, but after Punk broke we felt entitled to have a go ourselves. As well as playing the music, we designed our own posters and band logos and became excited by graphic design from the covers of the singles we bought. We organized our own gigs and fought with the audience at the local tennis club. Punk was liberating. It was the realization that we actually had a choice as to how we worked, no matter what the discipline- there was no 'right' way to do it. Technique and ability were not as important anymore: it was attitude that counted. Above all, Punk was *practical*. It was realistic. It gave people a chance. It was great being a Punk in 1977, and I remember this time well - or at least I thought I did.

My first Punk rock gig was on 3rd October 1977- *The Stranglers* at Leicester De Monfort Hall. My second was *The Clash* at the Kings Hall, Derby. Punk bands played wherever they were allowed to, sometimes not in the most comfortable of surroundings:

The King's Hall is a cavernous barn which doubles as a swimming pool, of all things.

The water is covered by boards.

(Kris Needs, Zig Zag magazine, December 1977 accessed from

http://homepage.mac.com/blackmarketclash/Bands/Clash/recordings/1976_77/77-11-03%20Derby/77-11-03%20Derby.html Date accessed 14.5.09)

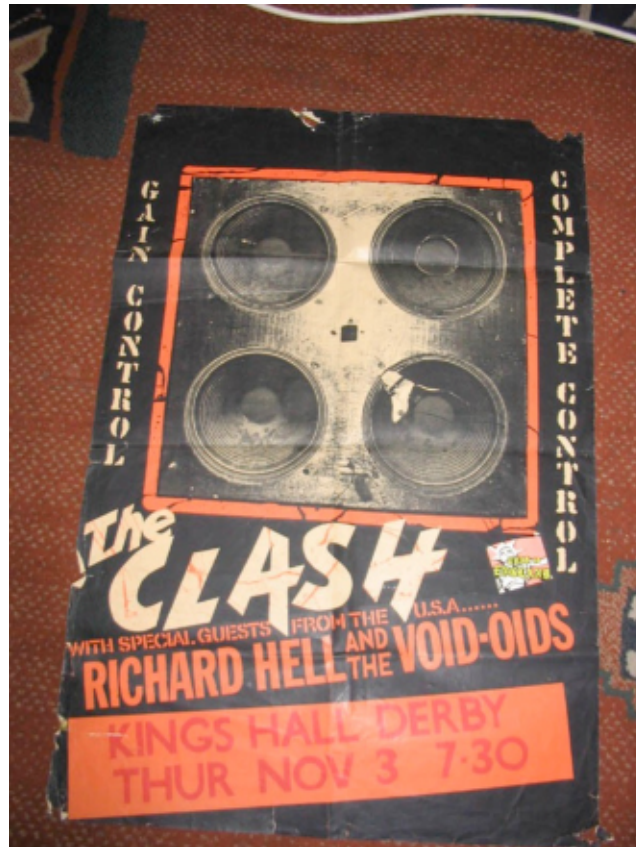


Fig 2: poster for the Clash concert at Kings Hall, Derby, 1977

This Clash concert particularly, in this most unpromising of environments, was part of what I have now come to understand and believe of as a paradigm shift: 1977 is now commonly described as 'Year Zero'. (Bech Poulson 2005)

Over the next 4 years I saw many of the Punk and New Wave bands perform, including *The Adverts* and *Penetration* (see appendix vi for a full list).

1.2 I aint never been to art school

In September 1978 I left Burton-upon-Trent for Stoke-on-Trent. Life at North Staffordshire Polytechnic was very different. I went there excited about art but

left disillusioned. Moments of genuine interaction with the tutors were rare, with the exception of visual studies sessions, which although mainly passive experiences, involved being introduced to European film, particularly from the Czech New Wave, including *Valeries Week of Wonders*, directed by Jaromil Jires and *The Firemens Ball*, directed by Milos Forman.

I went to study graphic design but spent most of the time within the fine art department, listening to Punk in the sculpture hanger with likeminded individuals. I painted and drew comics at home with fellow student Chris Reynolds, because the alternative was to go into class and design labels for a Christmas ale. My own, (admittedly raw) ideas, based on Pop Art and Punk record sleeves, were dismissed by tutors.



Fig 3: a piece of degree work by the writer from 1979

I carried on painting, drawing comics and designing despite, not because of, my art education. My lecturers had had very little understanding of the new

graphic language that Punk had developed through the picture sleeves wrapped around 7" singles; they were suspicious of it, and consequently I didn't have the courage to explore this language as much as I would have wished to.

I formed bands and played gigs, much as I had done before Polytechnic. There were plenty of other students who wanted to form bands and didn't even have a rudimentary knowledge of an instrument, but formed them anyway, influenced by groups such as Throbbing Gristleⁱ. They played what is now termed 'industrial music'. Some of them even played Jazz clubs, and tended to take themselves very seriously. These people would now be called sound artists, or indeed conceptual artists. It was an area of post-Punk that I did not identify with, not because of the lack of technical ability, but because I felt they were not trying to communicate to the audiences I associated with Punk attitude.

I left Polytechnic in 1982 with an Honours Degree in Graphic Design, having completed a final-year thesis on British subcultures, and moved to London and continued to play in bands. This included the post punk band *Happy Refugees*, who released an album in 1983 on their own label which was immediately forgotten about by both the critics and the band themselves until 2011, when it was rediscovered and name checked by a number of contemporary American bands. The American record label Acute Records

ⁱ Throbbing Gristle, who included Genesis P. Orridge, were a group that evolved from the performance art group COUM transmissions, who had exhibited and performed at the ICA, London, in 1976.

subsequently contacted the band and stated they would like to re-release it. I am therefore due to fly to New York four weeks after handing in this paper to play a gig promoting this re-release, an event certainly not foreseen at the beginning of this research project.



Fig 4: Penetration scrapbook

In 1985 I met Pauline Murray and Robert Blamire from the aforementioned Punk group *Penetration*, passed an audition and moved to Newcastle upon Tyne, and played on and off with them for the next 20 years.

Recalling these experiences became an early part of my research methodology, essentially interviewing myself in order to produce material from which the research would grow. I propose, as a general introductory

statement about my approach as a practice-led fine art researcher, that the idea of interviewing myself creates a form of anecdotal argument in which, as Mary Warnock describes in her introduction to Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (2003), the reader is not asked to agree to a proposition but to affirm a familiar experience and then agree that to reject the implications of the anecdote would be as contradictory for you as it would be for the person recalling the experience. (Warnock, 2003, p.xiv) This is how I will proceed throughout my thesis.

1.3 Back in the garage

In 1999 I read a piece on Stuckism, a pro-figurative painting art movement, in *The Sunday Times*, and my life changed again. There was an immediate identification within the ideas expressed and the work accompanying them, that had as great an impact on me as the day I heard *The Sex Pistols* for the first time. This led to my contacting Billy Childish, one of the co-founders of Stuckism, declaring I was probably a Stuckist, and asking what I should do next, but it was Charles Thomson, the other co-founder, who replied. This initial correspondence eventually led to the formation of the Newcastle Stuckists, a group independent from the original London Stuckists, with myself as the only member until 2009, when Chris Reynolds, my old college friend, joined the group. It has also led to a close and sometimes intense relationship with Thomson.

Whilst completing my MA at the University of Northumbria, myself and my partner Carol Lynn, a documentary filmmaker, recorded a series of interviews, resulting in the documentary *Stuckism - it's a dirty job but someone's got to do it* released by Deltapress in 2005. All of the main Stuckist artists practicing at that time were interviewed over a two-day period. Because of time constraints, and the fact that we wished to represent as many artists as possible, the interviews weren't always able to progress into areas that I wished to explore in more depth.

Although a good introduction to Stuckism, this experience led me to appreciate that there was a bigger story to tell than the one we ended up getting through the documentary. At that time, although having been a member of the movement for four years, I still felt outside of it. Many of the main protagonists had known and worked with each other for many years, often as far back as the late 70s. The interviews were, however full of promise, with the artists speaking honestly about themselves and their relationship to Stuckism. This initial honesty was important, as I was not used to talking to artists without intellectual barriers having to be hurdled before anything genuine was discussed, if at all. Artists can be very defensive, but these people didn't seem to have anything to hide. I related to them. They were also much more interested in talking about painting, as opposed to a career in painting. With the possible exception of Ella Guru, neither were they very ambitious. Much of the attitude demonstrated again reminded me of Punk.

I had assumed that there was a link between Punk and Stuckism when I first read *The Sunday Times* article. It was clear that Childish had been an interesting Punk musician in 1977 and was still, as an initiator of Stuckism, a radical creative practitioner in 1999. These early thoughts were later documented in my MA essay *Saatchi, Serota and Stuckism – the Battle for the Soul of Punk*, written in 2005 as a critique of the leading figures of the contemporary art establishment.ⁱⁱ The abstract stated:

This paper is not an attempt to put the Art World to rights. It is not an attempt to pin down the state of painting or British Art in general in 2005. It is simply a personal, but hopefully informed look at Charles Saatchi, Nicholas Serota and the Stuckist movement, and how they relate to Punk Rock.

(Harvey, 2005, p. 1)

Although journalistic, and sometimes ranting in nature, the MA essay laid down the basics for this thesis. At the time I put it rather crudely:

The Clash talked about being “back in the garage with my bullshit detector” (Garageband, The Clash 1977): compared to the wealth and power of figures such as Saatchi and Serota and the influence of critics, academics, and philosophers this is indeed where the Stuckists are at. (Harvey, 2005, p .7)

A couple of years or so before *The Sunday Times* article I had started painting seriously again after putting it aside to be a musician. I realised how much I loved it, and rapidly became obsessed with the act of putting paint onto

ⁱⁱ Charles Saatchi is generally considered to be one of the most powerful figures in contemporary British art. Sir Nicholas Serota is the director of the Tate.

canvas. I began having small exhibitions locally, and work began to sell. I had no ambition to be a professional artist for a variety of reasons, one being that I found I could not relate to most British contemporary art, as for me it lacked elements that I loved in earlier work. I was much more drawn to artists such as Giotto, Vermeer, and Alphonse Mucha. I had also recently been very strongly drawn to Van Gogh after a visit to the Van Gogh museum in Amsterdam. The young British artists (forthwith abbreviated to 'yBas') in particular, such as Damien Hirst, Rachel Whiteread and Tracey Emin, whose work was considered conceptual in approach, I found I could not empathise with. As a painter, I was also aware that Hirst had stated that painting was dead. For these reasons, I felt alienated from the art world, much as I had felt just before Punk about popular music, when the prevailing trend in rock was for the aforementioned progressive approach, now commonly termed 'prog rock'.

The Sunday Times article cemented the feelings I had regarding British contemporary art, much as Punk did regarding the predominant music scene of 1976. This led me to not only contact the Stuckists, but also to begin to re-evaluate my whole approach to the analysis of visual art using criteria that until now I had reserved for music. Art seemed so complex and obscure before the article. Could I use the same assessment criteria for both disciplines? According to the Stuckist manifesto, as far as I understood it, it seemed as if I could. I recognised the style of language. I began to see areas of commonality within Punk and Stuckism that I felt were worthy of further examination. Once I began to analyse further, other aspects seemed to be

linked. These included the methods of creating work, the lack of an overall style, and the reactions of critics and academics. I began to believe there was a strong link between the two movements, having experienced both at different stages in my development, first as a musician and later as a painter. There also existed the discussion as to where the two movements existed, as there was the public, media driven face, and then there was the heart of both movements that existed, I believed, in a different place. I wanted to find out where this place was, and why it mattered to me.

In this introductory chapter I have outlined the role of, what I will call, wilfully calculated anger and thus, my research has privileged what William Ian Miller has called the 'aggressive culture-creating passions' (he is referring to the immediate and violent emotional response we call disgust) that originally shaped my engagement with Punk. (Miller, 1987, p.36) Anger has been my best way of understanding why both Punk and Stuckism have meant so much to me. I do not subscribe to the idea that all-consuming feelings are outside the range of research because they do not fit comfortably with coherency of rational thought: scientific research can also be, despite the popular image of disinterested rationality, driven by emotional goals and regimes. I would cite the passion that drives scientific investigations related to curing diseases or meeting the environmentalist agenda. Thus the research journey described in this thesis has been driven by strong feelings that, according to the philosopher Carolyn Kormeyer (2011), can be seen as 'hot cognitions'. (Kormeyer, 2011, p.29) That is, as manifestations of semantic content that provide rapid appraisals of human situations. This has been my definition of

the culturally-oriented passion of Punk anger, the 'calculated' emotion I have noted above.

In order to transform my sense of anger into a practice-led methodology I have experimented with the anecdotal mode of argument described above.

Chapter 2: Methodology

The central component of my research is a comparison between Punk and Stuckism. My intention is to uncover the many points at which there are, as suggested in my introductory chapter, similarities and parallels. Before embarking on a description of the research that I hope will confirm this comparison, I will outline and discuss in more detail the research methods that have enabled me to investigate the various correspondences between these two distinct cultural ideas. Firstly I will define what I mean when I say that Punk and Stuckism are similar. This will involve a rather abstract consideration of the nature of likeness. Then I will move on to a discussion of the naratological and socio-cultural research I have drawn on to build a comparative picture of the two movements.

2.1 Similarity

I do not just think that Punk and Stuckism are similar, I feel it – and similarity is part of the shape of that feeling, an unmediated experience that drives my engagement with both movements. But what do I mean by the word ‘similar’? My supervisor Chris Dorsett recommended the description of this term that I have used to develop my comparative approach. In Umberto Eco’s *Kant the Platypus* (2000), the celebrated semiotician and novelist explained the process by which similarity is established in perceptual representations. (Eco, 2000, p. 344-348) The most obvious case of one thing being similar to another is the likeness that is created when the same, or near to the same,

form is shared by two disparate objects. In this sense likeness can be found between all kinds of external parts of the environment that happen to resemble one another: for example, a passing cloud in the sky can, for a fleeting moment, look like the face of a person you know. However, Eco is interested in the difference between these kinds of immediate perceptual likenesses and the types of similarity that are produced by criteria which seem to be rule-governed. Eco uses an example in which the rules 'higher than', 'wider than', 'shorter than' and 'bigger than' are the criteria for establishing similarity between sets of vertical lines and a row of four rectangles. Here you would not see the lines and the rectangles as being similar unless you were told the rule that makes them similar (e.g. in relation to the 'wider than' criterion the different lengths of the lines correspond to the different widths of the rectangles in terms that represent this particular structural property). This is the kind of similarity I seek to describe between Punk and Stuckism. My thesis will describe the structural properties of the two movements that are seen to be similar once we have established certain rules that uncover likeness. In this way I intend to link two socio-cultural identities that belong to two quite separate contexts.

As I wished to discuss Stuckism and its connection to Punk attitude, it was evident that by relating Stuckism to Punk, I was going to have to make sense of the huge amount of work written by academics within this area. I also had to re-assess my initial interpretations of Punk if my conclusion was to have any meaning. Part of my methodology, therefore, would be to analyse the key texts relating to Punk subculture, including the early work by the Centre for

Contemporary Cultural Studies (forthwith abbreviated to CCCS) at the University of Birmingham in the late Seventies and early Eighties to the work of David Muggleton (2000) and Roger Sabin (1999).

This aspect of my method would be achieved partly by way of a literature review. Muggleton and others have already achieved significant results by challenging CCCS thinking and so my aim has been to explore the debates about subculture from the point of view of a creative practitioner. The point would be to survey the literature with the eye of someone who had not only witnessed the events but also helped to create them. As a result, my research would not just consist of an 'I was there' argument. (Medhurst, 1999)

In order to successfully develop a Punk template that could be compared with Stuckism, I also had to establish what is meant when talking of a 'Punk attitude'. This is not easy. It was also not necessarily the role of this paper to bring new ideas forward regarding this area, as it has already been explored substantially, and I do not see myself as a subcultural theorist. I felt however, that the area of 'provincialism' within the Punk experience was under explored as well as being particularly relevant to Stuckism, so I gravitated towards this idea. There is little need in this paper therefore to discuss whether Punk as an idea was brought over by McLaren from the USAⁱⁱⁱ, how much Situationism (a group formed in 1957 with ideas rooted in Marxism and the 20th century European avant-garde) was an influence, or how far back Punk philosophy

ⁱⁱⁱ McLaren managed the American band The New York Dolls in the USA for a while before managing the Sex Pistols.

goes. Writers such as Greil Marcus and Jon Savage have looked at this in some depth; this is apart from the numerous academic texts and books written about Punk over the last 30 or so years. As Russell Bestley comments:

In *Lipstick Traces*, Greil Marcus attempted, rather unsuccessfully, to make connections between the Sex Pistols, Dada, Surrealism and sixteenth century political agitators, while in *England's Dreaming*, Jon Savage overemphasised Situationist connections and the promotion of women and gay rights within the early Punk movement. Simon Reynolds went one stage further in the political rehabilitation of the post punk avant-garde in his 2005 book *Rip It Up And Start Again*, building ivory towers on the supposed Marxist principles and intellectual foundations of Scritti Politti and the DIY post Punk elite.

(Bestley, 2007, p.76)

As Bestley observes above, Punk has been approached from a wide variety of angles, with an array of conclusions being put forward for discussion.

However this is not the only problem inherent in this subject matter. An attempt to show a democratic, overall view also results in a confusing complexity, as the Don Letts film *Punk Attitude* (2005) demonstrates.

Although to be commended for its ambition, Letts' attempt to tell the full story shows the difficulty of the task. Letts also had an experience that the vast majority of Punks did not have- a metropolitan one. However, the basic conclusions he comes to would be shared by most commentators, including myself, and consequently has much to offer when discussing Punk. This is because the provincial and metropolitan experience will have some areas of

commonality. But they were different enough, I believed, to treat as separate events.

2.2 Narrative Inquiry and the Practitioner

Information was pouring in as Stuckism began to grow and become more a genuine part of the contemporary art scene. It became harder to analyse and reflect on arising issues, as the movement was moving relentlessly forward, with new activities, new shows, new arguments and new strategies having to be tracked and documented. I was also becoming more of a major figure within the movement, eventually becoming one of the four main featured artists in shows, along with Thomson, Ella Guru and Joe Machine. Although I was very aware that I was undertaking a piece of practice-led research, it was still very evident that balancing my different roles was vital if the research was going to be of any worth. Stuckism was also becoming a good story however, and this constant movement forward I began to see as an inevitable and interesting one. This re-enforced my thinking in terms of it being an advantage to be closely involved with the subject, particularly as a practitioner. I had been relying to a certain extent on my own personal experiences, reflecting on them, putting them into context, and developing theories based on my findings. I realised however, that I was extremely lucky to be in a position of having access to a number of individuals, both from Punk and from Stuckism that I felt had interesting stories to tell. Some had been interviewed many times before, others not so. Those whose interviews I had read, including

friends and acquaintances of long standing, I was often disappointed by. For me, there was an element missing: the interviewer was often not a fellow practitioner. It was a similar problem for me when reading academic texts, and why I felt so distanced from them. I knew there were better stories to tell, and that it was just a matter of getting to them. Everyone has a story to tell, and perhaps the most interesting ones are those waiting to be given the chance- 'whose telling awaits the attentive ears and voices of conversational partners'. (Ochs and Capps, 2002, p. 113) Ochs and Capps suggest that we all have unrealised narratives within us, and that these may concern 'freshly recalled activities of the day or fragmented memories of remote events; they may be emotionally charged or seem trivial'. (Ochs and Capps, 2002, p. 113) This conversational approach was one I wanted to pursue as an extension of anecdotal mode with which I began my research.

When I had first interviewed the Stuckist artists for the DVD, as stated before, I felt like an outsider. By the time I had begun the research, this wasn't the case: I had formed much closer relationships with some of the artists, as my own position within the movement had changed. Now, admittedly as an academic researcher, but also a fellow practitioner, I felt I had a significant opportunity to address this 'distance'. A methodology, essentially revolving around conversational narrative inquiry, seemed an obvious way forward. 'Fragmented memories of remote events' are much more likely to appear within the context of a conversational interview as opposed, say, to a set of questions sent by email.

I was also accepting that my role as a practitioner and insider within Punk and Stuckism would help fit my knowledge within 'historical, cultural stories, beliefs and practices'. (Etherington, 2004, p. 75 derived from Burr 1995; Crossley 2000; Gergen 1985, 1994) The understanding that my interviewees experience their position in relation to a culture: whether on the margins, in the centre, or on becoming part of a new culture meant that my position within Stuckism I felt would not be a hindrance but a help. (Etherington, 2004)

The fact that I had already put forward a number of ideas within my original proposal meant that I might possibly have been going into this paper with an agenda. In the pocket guide to Stuckism, written in 2004, Thomson, states that 'Truth is what it is, regardless of what we want it to be'. This had helped me when considering my practice, and I was also able to take this on board when considering my methodology. Working to Stuckist philosophy enabled me to avoid having a pre-ordained set of ideas that I wanted to push once the research began. I was happy to be proved wrong. What then became difficult was appreciating how to research *without* an agenda- which processes should I avoid, and which will lead to a more authentic set of answers? This was an issue not just when negotiating an interview, but also when consulting periodicals such as the New Musical Express from 1976 to 1978, which I did exhaustively. What was I looking for? With that particular activity for example, I came to realise that there was more than an element of looking for my youth and reliving those exciting days, merely in fact, an exercise in nostalgia, and an avoidance of a more mature, yet obviously more difficult and time consuming methodology. This realisation also helped me to acknowledge that

my involvement in Stuckism could have been a similar exercise, that it was merely an opportunity to relive the experiences of my adolescence by taking an explicit anti-establishment stance- it was a possibility that this was the case, and if so, that I would need to accept it.

2.3 Looking in the right place



Fig 5: venue for the conversation with TV Smith, former singer with Punk band The Adverts

I already had a close relationship with Charles Thomson, who as co-founder would be vital in getting to the heart of Stuckism. I had never met Billy Childish but knew that my research would not be complete without his input. As time went on it was becoming apparent that these two, and Thomson in particular (Childish had left the movement in 2000, a year after its inception) were the most important people to concentrate on, as they co-wrote the two key manifestos. Other artists within the movement, both those who were there

at the formation of the movement, and those having joined subsequently, would also be important. The actual number of artists interviewed would depend on the progress and direction of the research, but it would also depend on time constraints, as at the time of putting plans into place, Stuckism had grown to 160 groups scattered worldwide, and it would not be possible to interview them all. At one point I considered sending a set number of questions to all practicing Stuckist artists, mainly to allay fears of being worried about what quantitative researchers tell us about the limits of small, non random samples. (Silverman: 2010) However, through prior experience, I realised that the artists who had joined the movement since its initiation had joined for a wealth of different reasons that were too complex to adequately explore in this research project. Furthermore, much like Punk, different Stuckist groups had subsequently developed their own agendas, each with a different *modus operandi*. As a result, some groups were one-person cottage industries whilst others were more robust with sizable membership lists. Although I do look at this area briefly, this evolution of the core Stuckist idea is another research project. I therefore concentrated on the two founder members and a significant sample of the original London Stuckists. It was still necessary to acknowledge the aforementioned groups who had formed later, so a number of artists who had not been original members were nevertheless interviewed, particularly ones who had interesting Punk-oriented stories to tell.

2.4 Looking in the right way

I needed to look at what I was actually doing when attempting to gather information. Barbara Czarniawska looks at these issues within her book *Narratives in Social Science Research*. Relating her ideas to Steinar Kvale's book *InterViews*, from 1996, Czarniawska discusses insights gained regarding the interview, stating that first of all, an interview is not a mutual exchange of views, but more of an 'inquisition' or an 'interrogation.' (Czarniawska, 1996) Her second insight concerned what an interview usually is, that is collecting views and opinions on whatever topic is mentioned. As Czarniawska states, this is not essentially what researchers are after as 'they want to know facts, or attitudes, or many other things outside the interview, the 'reality behind it', as it were'. (Czarniawska, 1996, p. 47) Again, a more conversational type of philosophical dialogue between the two parties seemed the best option. I needed to ensure however, that I was providing the right setting for these conversations to take place. The dynamic between the researcher and the subject can create barriers, as there is an implicit agreement that there is a power asymmetry, unlike say, that between a subject and a journalist. This is not in fact the reality, as the researcher is often not professional within the role of an interlocutor. Neither are they necessarily experts when discussing life stories with the subject. Czarniawska observes that what a researcher can best offer in this situation is respectful and interested attention. How then do we make this process work?

2.5 Cultural Anthropology and the Practitioners Voice

George E. Marcus and Michael M. J. Fisher consider the role of anthropology in relation to social sciences that are manifest as art, literature, and cultural criticism. In the second edition (1999) of *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (first published in 1986), they discuss the technology that has become such an important aspect of this new activity:

As we pass into the early twenty-first century, cultural critique faces new challenges due to massive demographic shifts that have challenged the idea of culturally homogenous nation-states; transnational communication and visual media in new modalities, which arguably are effecting transitions as profound in modes of rationality and cognition as those earlier from orality to literacy... as well as new concepts and metaphors for the way we act in the world.

(Marcus & Fisher, 1999, p. xvi)

They appreciate that these changes require new forms of inquiry and writing that attend to the various new actors and processes in the world. The wealth of information available can be difficult to process, produced as it is from a wide variety of sources with just as wide a variety of reasons for it being produced. Punk is a good example of this, whereas discussions around Stuckism mainly take place between Thomson, who is the main PR person for Stuckism, and critics, with academic discourse are still rare. It is still vital though, to acknowledge the views of the critic, ensuring that we are 'attempting to understand their diverse conditions of production, and to

incorporate the resulting analysis fully into the strategies which define any contemporary fieldwork project. (Marcus & Fisher, 1999, p. xx)

Paul Atkinson, in his book *The Ethnographic Imagination* (1990), references Jock Young and his work on drug-takers in Notting Hill, where he compares 'official' views of reality with the reality of an observed drug user. Young labels the 'official' view as 'fantasy'. For example, 'reality' is a 'highly organised bohemian community' whereas 'fantasy' is 'Isolated drug-users in socially disorganised groups'. From this example we can deduce that close observance of the drug taker (or practitioner) leads to a better 'reality'. If we can either communicate with that practitioner, or be part of that community, we may get an even better reality: that is if we document it with integrity.

Marcus and Fisher discuss the work of Hayden White, whose *Metahistory* (1973) looks at the impact of changes in social theory on nineteenth century European historical writing. White is described as promoting the idea that historical texts exhibit conflicting narratological features such as emplotment, argument, and ideological implication. For Marcus and Fisher these are also traits of anthropological writing and both fields have to deal with the difficulty that these features may be at odds with one another as they are employed to encompass and order a complex story. From this state of instability comes shifting modes of writing that lead to problems in representing the reality of a situation. (Marcus and Fisher, 1999, p. 12) In particular, Marcus and Fisher, through White, focus on the problem of authorial irony, remarking that historians and social scientists have usually failed to employ truly realist

(therefore non-ironic) modes of description because equally comprehensive and plausible, yet mutually exclusive, conclusions always arise from the same historical event. Thus, I have to accept conflicting views as equally plausible interpretations of our recent cultural history.

It is certainly the case that I have sought a methodological approach that avoided, as much as possible, ironic descriptions (in the sense used by Marcus and Fisher) of the relationship between Punk and Stuckism. I wanted a way of proceeding that could deal with different interpretations objectively. However Marcus and Fisher believe that if anthropologists accept and embrace an ironic mode of writing, using it alongside other strategies, they will produce more accurate descriptions of society. All researchers who wish to describe and define a social or cultural entity need to recognise that their own interpretations, as well as that of other informed commentators, are clearly open to critical review, and as such they need to acknowledge alternative positions if they are to produce a realistic overall description. The gist of Marcus and Fisher's work is that all forms of descriptive writing need to successfully deal with what they see as the contemporary crisis of representation. However, in the end, I find that I am broadly in sympathy with their ideas because I believe that many commentators on Punk and Stuckism have misrepresented the experiences of those involved.

Observers will always struggle to be objective, or as Muggleton observes of his own research:

provide anything more than a necessarily one-sided and partial understanding of subcultural phenomena. As I began by saying, my logic of conclusion and inquiry inevitably reflect my own values and interests (a point that is equally applicable to all authors and critics). (Muggleton, 2000, p. 6)

Atkinson believes that a research paper is as much an artefact of convention and contrivance when compared to any other cultural product. (Atkinson, 1990) It seems we are set up to fail. Perhaps the best we can do is to work with integrity, and to develop methodologies that will best reflect this approach. Muggleton understands this, and states that 'In the selection of a research topic, the decision to investigate particular aspects over others, and the logic and method of enquiry employed, are all inevitably grounded in the subjective values of the researcher.' (Muggleton, 2000, p. 1)

He goes on to relate his own relationship with Punk in 1970's Leicester. He also acknowledges the great debt owed to all his interviewees, in being willing to talk to virtual strangers. This was refreshing, and in its honest and simple, common sense attitude, could be considered Punk in its philosophy. It was also a way for me to validate my own approach. This approach differed though, in that the vast majority of my interviewees were not virtual strangers to me, and this fact, I believe, improves the possibility of a better 'reality'. Lee and Ingold (Coleman & Collins, 2006) discuss the importance of 'walking' in the book *Locating the Field*, stating that not only is it fundamental to 'the everyday practice of social life' but 'also fundamental to much anthropological fieldwork'. (Coleman & Collins, 2006, p. 67) They believe that we cannot 'simply walk into other people's worlds, and expect thereby to participate with

them. To participate is not to walk *into* but to walk *with*' (their italics). They use the term literally, but I would suggest that this term could also be used metaphorically. There is no doubt that literally walking with many of my interviewees has been a rewarding and informative experience, but the most enlightening aspects within my own ethnographic fieldwork have been the shared experiences over a longer period of time – of 'walking' alongside others within the confines of an art movement for example, or working on the same manifestos, dealing with the same curators, experiencing the same negative feedback from critics, and so on.

Working within the frame of specific methods then, causes problems, particularly, Marcus and Fisher believe, when researchers are faced with moments of profound social change. They suggest ethnography, a form of research derived from anthropology that focuses on the task of describing the distinctiveness of different cultures, as a way to address the issue of change within lived experience. As Brian Hoey (2011) discusses, ethnography is...

a means of expressing a shared interest among cultural anthropologists for telling stories – stories about what it means to be human. The other is that the explicit professional project of observing, imagining and describing other people need not be incompatible with the implicit personal project of learning about the self. It is the honest truth of fieldwork that these two projects are always implicated in each other. Good ethnography recognizes the transformative nature of fieldwork where as we search for answers to questions about people we may find ourselves in the stories of others. Ethnography should be acknowledged as a mutual product born of the intertwining of the lives of the ethnographer and his or her subjects

(http://www.brianhoey.com/General%20Site/general_defn-ethnography.htm accessed 5.9.11)

Here then we see a connection with Ochs and Capps 'everyday storytelling'. Hoey explains that by using an emic perspective, or the 'insider's point of view' we allow critical categories and meanings to emerge from the ethnographic encounter rather than imposing these from existing models. Hoey also does not see the contradictions inherent in being both a participant (or practitioner) and observer as an issue:

To develop an understanding of what it is like to live in a setting, the researcher must both become a participant in the life of the setting while also maintaining the stance of an observer, someone who can describes the experience with a measure of what we might call "detachment." Note that this does not mean that ethnographers cannot also become advocates for the people they study. Typically ethnographers spend many months or even years in the places where they conduct their research often forming lasting bonds with people.

(http://www.brianhoey.com/General%20Site/general_defn-ethnography.htm accessed 5.9.11)

If I were to follow this methodology, it would mean that undertaking interviews would form only a part of my overall approach. Just as vital would be the long periods of time spent with my fellow Punks and Stuckists in which I would be able to develop, in the words of Marcus and Fisher, a 'jeweller's eye view' of the world we shared. (Marcus & Fisher, 1999, p. 15) I was in an ideal position to be able to do this and 'embeddedness' is my key tool as a researcher.

However, once one has cultivated a 'jeweller's eye' the task of writing about what one has experienced remains. This is clearly as true in the Social Sciences as it is in the Arts because Atkinson's ethnographers are 'not much given to thinking about writing – except to the extent that students and practitioners [of Ethnography] often complain that it is hard work.' (Atkinson, 1990, p.1) This is certainly one of the downsides to being a practitioner that I have struggled with throughout my research. There is the continual danger of one's writing simply being an over-personal reflection on one's most idiosyncratic interests as an artist. Atkinson discusses how, when we read an ethnographic monograph, we are inevitably involved in complex processes of reality construction and reconstruction. As readers we bring 'our knowledge and sympathy (or lack of it) for the ethnographic style of writing'. (Atkinson, 1990, p. 2)

Therefore my ambition is to write this thesis in a manner that develops in the reader's imagination as a Punk-Stuckist style of investigatory and reflective writing and my hope is that the following chapters trigger those 'barely articulated cultural capacities' that Atkinson claims practitioners share with non-practitioner readers. (Atkinson, 1990, p. 2) In other words we are all in it together: what Atkinson claims for Ethnographic writing I would like to see be true of a practice-led thesis written by a Punk-Stuckist artist. The key idea here is to undertake research that responds to a situation in which one is part of the topic being researched. Here the most appropriate extension to the practice of ethnographic writing outlined above is a methodology gaining ground in the social science called autoethnography. Davis and Ellis (2008)

describe how the need to write from the perspective of 'the one who can speak' has been a challenge for traditional social science texts. (Davis and Ellis, 2008, p. 283) Of particular interest for my research project is the idea, discussed at length by Davis and Ellis, of interactive autoethnography. Here research findings are achieved within conversations between members of social groups to which the researcher belongs. The outcomes of this process are called co-constructed narratives and they allow a multi-vocal meaning to emerge. The following three chapters of this thesis have been informed, not just by my reading of the current literature on subcultures, but also by extensive discussions with conversational partners who are either Punks, or Stuckists, or both.

2.6 Calculated Anger and Interactive Autoethnography

Alongside these debates about method, there was one aspect of being a Punk musician and a Stuckist artist that I needed to accept and acknowledge as an unconventional research technique: this was that anger had been a guiding force within both experiences. Whilst this emotional condition may not be immediately evident within my current activities as a Stuckist painter, anger is certainly part of the intellectual polemic that shapes the context of Stuckism and, therefore, the rationale for undertaking my research. Being angry, of course, would normally be considered a weakness within objective, academic research. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that a sense of outrage has played a contributory factor within the development of my methodological

approach if this thesis is going to be fully understood. By the mid-point of my research I was experimenting with a typographical procedure that I hoped would support the important role of calculated anger in my ambitions as a writer of persuasive research-based prose. I was using bold type when I wanted to make opinionated remarks that had no supporting evidence except my own feelings, feelings that had formed the very foundations of my ambitions as a researcher. In Punk language, this would be called 'ranting'. Here Punk poets such as Attila the Stockbroker and Steven (Seething) Wells were my models. I decided not to go forward with this idea when I discovered that I could quote Mark E. Smith's *Renegade* (2008), a book that documents his time with the Manchester Punk band *The Fall*. I realised that this would do the job for me.

Smith would argue though, that *The Fall* was not a Punk band, but history will possibly question that stance. Smith says...

a lot of those Punk bands who wanted to be 'Punk'- not like us – they turned their backs on their real selves, embracing all the old rock postures and themes instead of keeping to what they did best. . . . That's why I've never aligned myself to the whole Punk thing. To me, Punk is and was a quick statement. (Smith, 2009, p. 42)

Smith is comparing himself essentially to the metropolitan scene, whereas the provincial (Manchester) scene where *The Fall* came from, as I have argued, was and is different. Smith, although he would disagree, I believe is a good example of a provincial Punk experience. At one point I was wishing to interview Smith for this research, but once his book was released I felt I had

all the information I needed. I would also contend that it is a valuable, and brilliant, document of both that initial provincial Punk experience, and subsequent thinking in later years that has been fuelled by those initial experiences. Smith understands, for example, the problems inherent in the distance between the practitioner and the critic:

...those fuckers played on their ego just as much as I did. What drove all of those late-70s journalists was the fact they weren't in a band. (Smith, 2008, p. 150)

Most journalists believe everything they read. It sounds clichéd but it's the truth. They've got bollocks for brains, and they're lazy. They can't be bothered to verify what's in front of their eyes. They're so distanced from the subjects they're writing about they have to turn to the internet. (Smith, 2008, p. 156)

This laziness that Smith remarks on is evident, I contend, within much of the writing concerning Stuckism, including an over reliance on the internet for information as opposed to meaningful discussion with the protagonists themselves.^{iv}

2.7 Summarizing the central idea driving my methodological approach

^{iv} Incidentally, Cobley (1999) in the book *Punk Rock: so what?* uses not only a Fall song title for his piece on provincial Punk (*Leave the Capitol*) but also uses the lyrics from Fall songs for all his subheadings.

There are then, a number of different approaches I have taken in order to investigate my proposition. I believe that this is not to the detriment of the thesis, as I did not want to make the mistake of working to a specific theory, as different aspects of the research demanded different approaches. There was an overriding approach, however, that relates to the idea of the conversational narrative as a methodological tool for understanding and documenting stories, as opposed to say, literary or historical narratives. But it is tied in with the sharing, with the interviewees, of the experience as a practitioner in both Punk and Stuckism: a truly emic approach. If, as Ochs and Capps believe, 'people the world over feel compelled to recount their experiences to others', then a better conversation must surely develop if the interlocuter has empathy with, or at least understands, the interviewees concerned. (Ochs and Capps, 2002 p. 113) If we add to this the aforementioned 'jewellers eye' approach, then there is a coherent set of methodologies that could be termed 'the practitioners voice'. In order to embed this into the paper, henceforth, the word 'conversation' will be used as opposed to 'interview', and likewise 'interviewees' will now be known as 'conversational partners'. I believe these terms reflect more closely the reality of the experiences I have documented, discussed and evaluated in the following chapters of my thesis.

Chapter 3: Punk

In this chapter I will focus on the concept of Punk attitude in order to explore in detail the validity of the provincial punk experience, the concept that will form the basis of my discussion of the relationship between Punk and Stuckism later in the thesis. It is also in this chapter that I begin to feature excerpts from my recorded discussions with conversational partners. In order to clearly identify direct quotes from these transcripts I have used different coloured fonts. Conversations with visual artists are in green, musicians in blue, and academics in brown. In addition, a short biographical introduction to everyone I met, spoke to and recorded during this research project is included in the *dramatis personae* at the beginning of the thesis.

3.1 Looking for a Punk attitude

As Bestley discusses, the received version of UK Punk history is centred around key individuals in the major cities (particularly London). This history has been widely accepted as an authentic account of the period and has led, according to Bestley, to a 'stylised and inaccurate summary of what was a disparate and fragmented movement.' (Bestley, 2007, p.23)

He discusses that many of the participants involved in Punk, 'have deeply-felt personal views and memories of events that touched their lives and placed them within the collective consciousness of Punk, on a more or less visible

level, and their recollection of events is bound to be affected by personal taste and experience.’ (Bestley, 2007, p. 23) This ‘diverse range of opinions, each of which may be termed valid in relation to any punk ‘ideology’, places the primacy of personal experience against attempts at objective historical analysis.’ (Bestley, 2007, p. 23)

David Muggleton, in his book *Inside Subculture The Postmodern Meaning of Style* (2000) quotes Geoff, one of his informers, who states that ‘Punk is what you make it. Paradoxically, this is the essence of punk, and only ‘true’ punks realize this.’ (Muggleton, 2000, p. 2) Muggleton’s research, I recognised, was an important rejection of previous work on subcultures, notably the work of the CCCS. Dick Hebdige’s research and eventual book, *Subculture The Meaning of Style*, published in 1979, was one of the first to discuss Punk from an academic viewpoint and is the key CCCS study that I will discuss in relation to my own thoughts on subculture. I came to see Muggleton’s book as the conclusion of a discussion that began with the CCCS. Writing post-2000 saw a shift from the term ‘subculture’ to ‘post-subcultures’ (Muggleton and Weinzierl, 2003). This term reflected the changes in thinking brought about by the digital revolution and the subsequent fragmentation of contemporary youth culture. Although it first appeared as a term in 1987 as Muggleton and Weinzierl state, they inform us that the term post-subculture, as it is understood now, is a much more recent development in terms of a constructed field of study. This writing began to look at more contemporary tribes; this is the subject area for subcultural and post subcultural theory after

all. As Muggleton told me when I asked him why he had not interviewed anyone over 34 for his book:

DM Freemasons might be a subculture, Moonies might be a subculture, so you can apply the term... but it is more often applied to *youth* subculture because there is a point where you are leaving, you're leaving a certain set of fixed expectations about being a child or an adolescent.

PH Yeah

DM And you are still relatively free at that age because you are depending upon your parents. You probably haven't got a mortgage or a job. You are not married, but you are not an adult, you are leaving one and not becoming the other and it is a kind of, between subcultures because you are neither one nor the other, it is a period where you perhaps become relatively autonomous, you are no longer a fourteen year old kid depending upon your parents, but you are not a 25 year old who actually has a mortgage and a job and so on and it is a period of experimentation, and this is why most subcultures tend to be aligned with youth. So why a Punk at 17 years old and not 52? It is because they are hearing a record at the point where they are very... they are ripe in their stage of life, sociologically formed, and that is it.

PH Yeah, absolutely, yeah, yeah

DM Although if you read all the classic texts you would think I shouldn't really interview anyone above 21.

(Muggleton in conversation with the author, 10.12.10, Holborn, London)

Stuckism was using the internet very successfully to reach out worldwide. It seemed to me that it was using old school (Punk) attitudes with new school technology, an activity discussed, for example in *The Pirates Dilemma- How hackers, Punk capitalists and graffiti millionaires are remixing our culture and changing the world* (Mason, 2008). In 2003 Muggleton and Weinzierl observed that 'the subculture concept seems to be little more than a cliché, with its implications that both 'subculture' and the parent culture against which it is defined are coherent and homogenous formations that can be clearly demarcated. But contemporary youth cultures are characterized by far more complex stratifications than that suggested by the simple dichotomy of 'monolithic mainstream' – 'resistant subcultures'.' (Muggleton & Weinzierl, 2003, p. 7)

Essentially, as regards Punk attitude, I was looking for the roots of it. I was also looking for how it had developed, including elements that I believe are evident in Stuckism. I am not arguing that Stuckism itself could be considered a subculture as the protagonists are too old, just that it may be at least partly derived from one: if Punk was the ranting of adolescents, then Stuckism is a mature, educated version of that initial Punk anger. Stuckism is not about youth, but about a group of individuals who experienced a subculture and have learnt from it. Consequently, although I looked into writing post 2000, it

was a not a significant part of the research, as I felt it didn't relate fully either to the original Punk movement or to Stuckism.

Hebdige's book is still considered a landmark thesis on subcultures, and as such needs to be considered. I first read this book whilst completing my degree thesis on subcultures in 1982, finding it difficult to comprehend. I also, as a Punk, be it 5 years after the initial fruition of the movement, did not recognise myself within its pages. Muggleton remarks that he had a similar experience:

Some years after the demise of punk (my version of punk, that is), I was browsing in a Leicester book shop when my eye caught the lurid cover of Dick Hebdige's book *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979). Both the cover image and the title prompted me to buy, hoping perhaps that it might help me to recapture the feeling and spirit of those heady times. I took it home, began to read, and could hardly understand a word of it. I fought my way through until the bitter end, and was left feeling that it has absolutely nothing to say about my life as I had once experienced it (thus confirming Hebdige's own concluding remarks on 'the distance between the reader and the text'). (Muggleton, 2000, p. 2)

Muggleton's relating of this experience concerning Hebdige's book was important for me, as not only had Muggleton confirmed my feelings about my lack of recognition within it, but he also stated a key point concerning this 'distance'. In this respect, the distance was between the reader and the text, but I felt that just as important an issue to acknowledge was the distance between the academic and the subculturalist, or practitioner. I wished to argue that Punk was a special case, that it was the subculture that for all its

negativity, encouraged inclusivity and taking on the role of the practitioner like no other before it. For example, Muggleton himself was briefly a bass player in the Punk band *The Street Sadists*. This aspect, that of Punk showing you were fully entitled to participate in it as a creative individual, was never discussed by Hebdige.

Throughout the Hebdige book there is an over reliance on Barthes and the importance of 'signs', a popular philosophical area during this time, as well as the perceived negative aspects of the movement:

Like the myths of Roland Barthes, these 'murdered victims' - emptied and inert – also had an alibi, an elsewhere, literally 'made up' out of vaseline and cosmetics, hair dye and mascara. But paradoxically, in the case of the punks, this 'elsewhere' was also a nowhere – a twilight zone - a zone constituted out of negativity. Like Andre Breton's Dada, punk might seem to 'open all the doors' but these doors 'gave onto a circular corridor (Breton, 1937). (Hebdige, 1979, p. 65)

With hindsight, we can now conclude that Punk did in fact open a number of doors, a possibility not foreseen by Hebdige at the time. This theory has been argued by many, and is now generally accepted- this is one reason 1977 is often referred to as Year Zero. It could also be argued that there was a shift away from accepted norms that was actually profound, and cut through many different areas within society. It also though opened a Pandora's box, where anything and everything ends up being compared to Punk.

The theories expressed within the book are unavoidably concerned with ideas popular in Seventies cultural studies. Muggleton talks about this and about the three other books written around the same time, all related to the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies: 'It is not that Subculture: The meaning of style is not without its virtues...' and quotes Waters (1981) as saying 'the four books... taken together, manage to convey many of the concepts that have been important in this new approach to working class youth culture' but he then states 'in my view, this means they also display many of the same methodological and theoretical inadequacies. (Waters, 1981, p. 24) The most serious, with the qualified exception of Willis's ethnographic study, is their failure to take seriously enough the subjective viewpoints of the subculturalists themselves.' (Muggleton, 2000, p.3)

This is a key point in this research project because in many studies of Punk the author seems a long way away from the subject. The case studies are removed from the real experience, with no opportunity for the subjects to articulate their concerns. Hebdige himself, as Muggleton observed, strangely, accepts this in his conclusion:

The study of subcultural style which seemed at the outset to draw us back towards the real world, to reunite us with 'the people', ends by merely confirming the distance between the reader and the 'text', between everyday life and the 'mythologist' whom it surrounds, fascinates and finally excludes. (Hebdige, 1979, p. 140)

This is a trap that I wished my own research not to fall into. I would go further than Muggleton and suggest that the feeling throughout the Hebdige book is one of the scientist and the monkey in the cage. Hebdige writes:

It is perhaps appropriate that the punks, who have made such large claims for illiteracy, who have pushed profanity to such startling extremes, should be used to test some of the methods for 'reading signs' evolved in the centuries-old debate on the sanctity of culture. (Hebdige, 1979, p.19)

British punk bands, generally younger and more self-consciously proletarian, remained largely innocent of literature. (Hebdige, 1979, p.27)

He also comments on how Punk bands positioned themselves visually:

In punk, alienation assumed an almost tangible quality. It could almost be grasped. It gave itself up to the cameras in 'blankness', the removal of expression (see any photograph of any punk group), the refusal to speak and be positioned. (Hebdige, 1979, p.28)

Hebdige has mistaken the naïve posturing of young people when being photographed for a publicity shot, for a state of mind. This crude interpretation of Punks is, in reality, little different from tabloid ideas of the time, for example, the famous *The Filth and the Fury* headline in The Daily Mirror in 1976.^v For many, Punk was an opportunity to read and to learn- it opened up possibilities

^v This headline appeared the morning after the Sex Pistols' appearance on the Bill Grundy television chat show *Today*, which was transmitted live. The event has gone down as a pivotal moment in introducing punk rock to a provincial audience, even though it was originally only shown in the London ITV region.

not recognised before. Certain writers were considered vital within Punk circles, ones that are now established as important figures today: J.G. Ballard, for example was widely read. For the Medway Poets Punk gave them an opportunity to write and perform with a different dynamic, freeing them from the restraints of academic poetry.

Class is an issue in Hebdige's thinking, with Marxist ideology prevalent. Although it can be acknowledged that it may have been more relevant in Hebdige's time (Teds, Mods, Skinheads etc.), I would argue that too much emphasis is given to this area. Even during early Punk, I was involved with a number of Punk musicians, many of whom did not look like Punks at all but held the same beliefs and produced Punk music. They came from different backgrounds, many of them, it needs to be stated, were middle class, not just working class, the area which Hebdige tends to concentrate on. Hebdige talks of 'the cult of the street (and a penchant for self laceration)' (Hebdige, 1979, p. 25); what or where exactly is the street, and who exists on it? And do they all self-harm? Many provincial Punks came from the suburbs, went to grammar schools and into higher education, often a Polytechnic. Hebdige talks of the Punk environment as emanating from 'the recognisable locales of Britain's inner cities. It spoke in city accents. And yet, on the other hand, it was predicated upon a denial of place. It issued out of nameless housing estates, anonymous dole queues, slums-in-the-abstract.' (Hebdige, 1979, p. 65) Housing estates are rarely nameless for the people who live there. Some Punks certainly did live on housing estates, and others lived in substantial Victorian 'semis'.

3.2 It was easy, it was cheap, go and do it

One of the most common philosophies often related to Punk is that of do-it-yourself (DIY) – that is, getting out there and doing it, regardless of experience or technical ability. I myself formed a Punk band within weeks of first hearing *The Sex Pistols*, working with a drummer who had never drummed and a bass player who had never played bass. Importantly though, they had the right attitude. This DIY philosophy was not recorded in retrospect, but was explicit at the time. The well-known graphic ‘this is a chord, this is another, this is a third, now form a band’ had appeared as early as January 1977 in the fanzine *Sideburns* (not Sniffin’ Glue as is often stated).

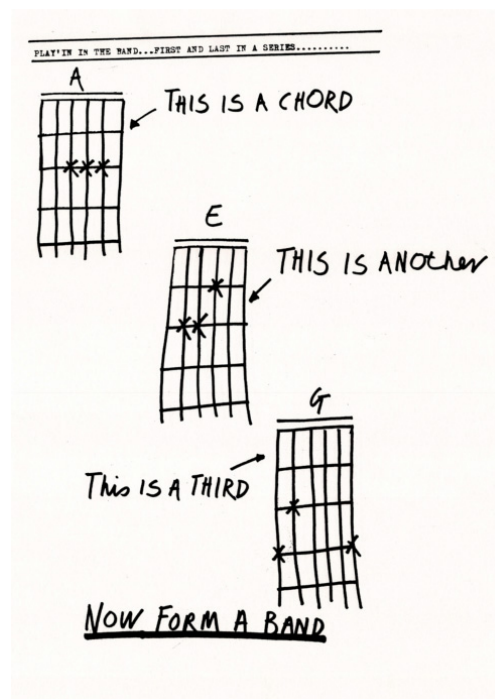


Fig 6: *Sideburns* graphic

I would still cite this call to arms in *Sideburns* as an important demonstration of Punk attitude. It is worth noting that the do-it-yourself approach of Punk

musicians was not picked up by Hebdige. The editorial on page 3 of *Sideburns* expands on the idea of DIY:

One year ago there was F.A. today there is something there is the Jam?.. doing a gig on the fuckin' pavement, kids of fifteen-sixteen forming bands and making people get off their arses for once This whole movement is about change – next week there might be ten more bands, ten more mag's, ten more small private record labels, ten more people chucking in their non-existent jobs and for once doing something for themselves. (Sideburns, 1977, p. 3)

Later Bestley discusses this graphic...

This playfully ironic description, which both celebrates the creative potential of the new wave [of Punk] whilst at the same time mocking the critics who had poured scorn on the musical incompetence of punk musicians, was carried through on a number of early punk records and flyers. The Adverts first single, *One Chord Wonders*, was released by Stiff Records in April 1977, and a tour poster for their support slot with The Damned at around the same time included the sardonic caption "THE DAMNED can play three chords. THE ADVERTS can play one. Hear all four..."

(Bestley, 2007, p. 126)

For many Punks, the movement gave them an opportunity to speak for the first time, unrestricted by a lack of technical ability. As we see from the quote above, it was even celebrated. No one was speaking on their behalf, so they did it themselves, creatively. Hebdige is fairly dismissive of the actual creative element of the movement, the outpouring through the music, describing it as 'the frantic Sturm und Drang of new wave music' and 'a barrage of guitars

with the volume and treble turned to maximum accompanied by the occasional saxophone would pursue relentless (un)melodic lines against a turbulent background of cacophonous drumming and screamed vocals.’ (Hebdige, 1979, p. 67) Superficially speaking, this is a reasonable observation, but a simplistic one. There is an implicit lack of appreciation of Punk music evident throughout the book. It is also making the mistake of concentrating on a subjective critique of the sound as opposed to what is being said, the attitude behind it, the integrity shown, and how well it communicated to an audience.

Hebdige discusses Punks as passive creatures and has missed that for many Punks, the movement gave them the opportunity to actually do something, to realise that they did have a right to a voice and that they were entitled to do and say something- also that what they had to say was relevant. The DIY aesthetic was a vital aspect of Punk philosophy.

There was indeed an aspect of negativity to Punk though, and that has to be acknowledged, but it was a complex balance. Howard Devoto^{vi} has said that ‘Punk was slightly, wonderfully, but nevertheless impossibly negative. And also impossibly contradictory.’ Interestingly, Thomson, who experienced the Sixties counter culture more deeply than the Punk movement, also sees this negativity, this passivity within Punk:

^{vi} Howard Devoto was the original singer for Manchester Punk group Buzzcocks.

The hippies actually believed in something that was really going to happen, and by the time of Punk it was disillusionment. The Punks liked wandering around looking like something. The hippies wandered round looking like something but they believed it was embodying real value, whereas the Punks kind of wandered round looking like something because they were saying “fuck off” to everybody, which has a place, but you can’t base a society on saying “fuck off”. The hippies were building something, the Punks were expressing a necessary disillusionment with what was going on. The hippies were obviously disillusioned with what was going on but they replaced it with something, or tried to. A lot of those things that they replaced it with are still with us, some worthwhile and some not. (Thomson in conversation with the author, 15.1.09, Finchley, London)

Suzanne Moore shares this idea of Punk telling everyone to ‘fuck off’:

One band used to come on stage and just tell us all to ‘fuck off’ for a good 20 minutes or so until a fight broke out and the band did fuck off.

If Punk was the ultimate fuck-off then what kind of truth are we trying to tell these days? That I truly understand the meaning of fuck off? That I fucked off first? That once upon a time ‘fuck off’ meant something that it just doesn’t mean these days? (Moore, 1999, p. 233)

Perhaps ‘fuck off’ genuinely does mean something different now- perhaps the term has been devalued, much like the term ‘Punk’ itself. They sound like a great band to me- certainly better than a band telling us “we love you” for 20 minutes. Although Thomson insists he experienced Punk, it was not to the

same extent as say, Childish. These observations are clearly valid, but are one aspect of the movement only. Thomson does in fact also acknowledge that there was a positive aspect to Punk:

There was a truth that Punk was expressing. It wasn't being expressed by people like Peter Gabriel, who would just do massive concerts, basically just light entertainment. Punk came along and said "actually, culture, music cannot be about light entertainment, it has to be about emotional reality, it has to be about philosophy, it has to be about insight, concepts that matter" which is a feeling of futility, you know. Or the feeling of the need to relate and to have love affairs, the feeling of frustration in this way and the feeling of hope in that way, these themes endure in human experience. Loss, grief, death, life, birth, hope, happiness, yearning, ambition, frustration, fulfilment, trust, integrity, loyalty. All these themes, these great themes that matter to us. They are the things that matter, that is what art has got to deal with and when art starts dealing with just the form for its own sake then it is weak, or when it deals with the form that it purports to address these issues and actually doesn't, then it is weak. So obviously Damien Hirst's shark in the tank purports to address these issues, but what we experience from that is not an insight or an engagement with these issues, it is just an insight and an engagement to a shark in a tank, and not into the issues it is meant to be dealing with, because the form it has taken doesn't embody those issues, and Stuckist work, I am not saying everything reaches that level, but relatively speaking it does. (Thomson in conversation with the author, 15.1.09, Finchley, London)

Here Thomson is able to relate Stuckist work to Punk concerns, particularly the need to communicate, to share concerns, and to have a basis in reality.

Hebdige is also obsessed with the link between reggae and Punk, and in a wider sense, the link between the black immigrant experience and the white working class one, remarking that 'although apparently separate and autonomous, Punk and the black British subcultures with which reggae is associated were connected at a deep level. Such a reassessment demands a shift of emphasis... to what I feel to be the largely neglected dimension of race and race relations.' (Hebdige, 1979, p. 29) This connection is emphasised throughout Hebdige's work, citing as proof the musical tastes of Johnny Rotten (singer of the Sex Pistols) and Jordan (who worked in Vivienne Westwoods Seditonaries shop on the Kings Road in 1977). However the London scene, specifically the scene around Sex and Seditonaries, cannot be used to explain the provincial experience, which is where Punk, I would argue, had the biggest sociological impact. The London scene was a more sophisticated, fashion centred experience. Don Letts, the main force behind the connection between Punk and reggae, was deeply involved in the London scene, and this led to his participation in that scene, from DJ at the Roxy Punk club to documenting Punk band *The Clash* through film. But it wasn't a connection that translated nationwide, as unless you lived in an inner city, the site of a Rasta was not a common experience, and consequently was not at the forefront of provincial Punk thinking. Provincial Punk, for better or for

worse, was very white.^{vii} Bestley (2007) acknowledges this and quotes Rimmer (1985) when he states that 'punk established itself as the first authentically White ethnic music.' (p.54)

Hebdige says that 'For, at the heart of the Punk subculture, forever arrested, lies this frozen dialectic between black and white cultures – a dialectic which beyond a certain point (i.e. ethnicity) is incapable of renewal, trapped, as it is, within its own history, imprisoned within its own irreducible antinomies.' (p.69) The proposal of this antinomy (derived from Kant) I believe is an error, as not only has multicultural integration worked, to a certain extent, physically in Britain, but it has also worked, creatively, within music. The seeds of this were sown in the immediate post Punk music emanating from cities such as Bristol, where elements of reggae and particularly dub, were integrated into 'white music'. Coventry saw the rise of Two Tone, with the multi racial Specials. White music was also integrated into black. Within two years of the Punk explosion, it was not unusual to see bands with members from both black and white cultures producing music that seamlessly integrated black and white music, to create a new dynamic that continues to be valid today. It also introduced new ideas to the white, provincial experience, leading eventually to Rock Against Racism, the anti racist movement that flourished mostly within the Punk movement. So there was a link, but not in the way Hebdige discussed.

^{vii} My first Punk gig had the black reggae group from Birmingham Steel Pulse as support to The Stranglers. They were bottled off stage by the predominantly white male audience

An area that Hebdige only mentions as an afterthought whilst suggesting further reading on hippies, is the connection between Punk and Situationism. Although again this was a mostly London based connection (Malcolm McLaren, manager of *The Sex Pistols*, was an advocate), it is an interesting omission, as it would have negated Hebdige's assertion that Punk was not a literary movement. It suggests an underestimation of awareness around Punk. Having said this, again the provincial experience was one that largely existed without understanding of these concepts, and it must be reiterated that this provincial experience was by far the most common one.

There was, however, much diversity within the music, even during the early years of the movement. Elements from many other areas not mentioned by Hebdige such as Kraut Rock, US and UK Sixties garage, as well as more avant garde areas such as Musique Concrete, and Industrial Music, are all evident within early Punk music, that negate Hebdige's idea of Punks being illiterate and 'largely innocent.'

It could be suggested that part of the reason why the book is considered so important is the mere fact that a serious book on Punk was written at all so quickly after the initial event. It also gave students such as myself the opportunity to access quotes for a degree thesis on that ultimate cliché at the time – 'British subcultures'. Nevertheless this term remained part of the mindset of sociologists from the 70s and this is the gist of my critique of the CCCS approach to Punk.

3.3 The Importance of the Practitioner

Hebdige's book, as acknowledged by Muggleton, and as we have discussed, is unsatisfactory on a number of levels, first of all and most importantly on its lack of field research, namely the thoughts of the subjects themselves. The practitioner is absent.

With Muggleton's book this is not the case. He argues that by following his Neo-Weberian approach we can, albeit in a subjective way to some extent, produce conclusions that the subjects would recognise in themselves. He does much of the work in pulling apart Hebdige's approach, but this is mainly by comparing different philosophical approaches. Muggleton also nails his colours to the mast in explaining, very early on, that he has had the experience of a provincial Punk rocker, thereby having an insight into his subject. He also uses narrative inquiry to get to the heart of the subject. Muggleton, however, puts his experience of being a Punk very much into the past tense, and, in fact, is vague about the concept of being a provincial Punk. When I asked him to explain his experience during that time, he said that:

I think part of the problem of answering those kind of questions, I am trying to think out loud, is partly because some of those phrases or terms you are using weren't known to me at the time

PH well exactly (laughs)

DM So what I am trying to do is impossible so I will do my best, but it is impossible: in a sense it is a bit like, the nearest example that I can give you which might resonate with you is something about trying to do hermeneutics on art.

PH Yeah

DM And the claim that you can't see a piece of art and interpret it as it was meant to be because your own perspective not just gets in the way but frames your own understanding of what that artist knew it was about. So it is a bit like the problem I have got with trying to see what it was like 35 years ago using a kind of terminology that I didn't understand and probably never heard then. I suppose the idea of provincial Punk now sounds to me like it is a kind of, although you didn't mean it this way, a bit like an insult, like you're not a proper Punk. I am not saying you meant it that way.

(Muggleton in conversation with the author, 10.12.10, Holborn, London)

In mentioning the issues that arise when a profoundly philosophical process such as hermeneutics (a process originating in the difficulty of interpreting obscure religious meanings in biblical texts) is applied to the non-textual immediacy of popular culture, Muggleton may be revealing his roots in the methods of the revolutionary sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920). Weber's aim was to develop a field of studies that, following the pioneering work of Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), employed interpretive methods that matched both the

internal and the relational complexity of human actions, utterances, products and institutions. (Bullock, Stallybrass, & Trombley, 1988, p. 380) I took Muggleton's words as an intelligent and polite warning about the problem of confusing my autobiographical story with the cultural, social and political narratives of the late 1970s. I was, at this point, beginning to appreciate the difficulties associated with the autoethnographical method introduced in chapter 2. I understood Muggleton's position in not wishing to interpret his early experiences as a Punk in any detail – objectivity will always be called into question when the 'I' of the researcher is also the 'other' who is researched. Nevertheless Muggleton was willing to engage in discussions that were helpful to my research, contributing insights that reinforced my need to address the issue of who is actually in a position to speak on behalf of Punk subculture:

DM ... so yeah I mean I was a provincial Punk because I wasn't in London hearing about Punk in ways which I subsequently read from things like John Savage.

PH Yes, yes

DM So yes I was, but it is very hard for me to know how different that was because you are only located in your own little tiny space.

PH Of course, yeah, I suppose, you know, you can try and get to the heart of it by talking about specifics, I mean, you know the people that hung around the Kings Road...

DM right

PH ... who probably would already have heard of, you know, the term Situationism for example by 1976 whereas, you know, myself as a provincial Punk I had never heard of Situationism until, you know, probably I went to Polytechnic and even then I didn't equate it. So was that your experience?

DM Yeah, exactly, I had never heard of Situationism till probably in the 1980's...

PH Yeah

DM ... when I read about it at University and that was completely after my experience of Punk, in fact I never even heard the word Punk until, I can't be precise because I have often thought about this, because doing research on Punks often led me to wonder when I first understood when Punk occurred or what it was. I don't recall hearing the word, like I know when it was but I can't remember when it was. I can remember the example, I can remember it being on television, I can remember it being some kind of Midlands tea time based show a bit like Nationwide but it wasn't on BBC, I think it was on ITV. (Muggleton in conversation with the author, 10.12.10, Holborn, London)

Another conversational partner, the Stuckist artist Sexton Ming also discussed his ignorance regarding Situationism:

PH And there were other terms that were around in the London scene in retrospect have come to be written up by people like John Savage as really important, but it was alright if you were writing about the London scene: words like Situationism for example

SM Oh I have never heard that one.

PH Have you never heard it since?

SM what is Situationism, a sitcom or something?

(Ming in conversation with the author, 6.2.11, Islington, London)

There is a difference between Muggleton and myself, in that I would state that I am still a Punk, and said as much during my conversation with him. I too had the experience as a provincial Punk in the Midlands, but I still feel like a Punk. The environment changes, but this feeling travels with me.

Most work on subculture concentrates on the youth aspect, of rebelling against your elders, which is essentially for many, merely a part of growing up. I am interested in what happens when this anti-establishment stance matures, when it is not simply a matter of 'style', or of saying 'fuck off' to everything. I don't have the distance that even a former Punk such as as

Muggleton now has, as I have been a practitioner since 1977. Stuckism, as I understand it at this point, is for me a continuation of an original Punk stance, but with a more focussed, mature and informed approach. I am also a Stuckist. So although we must accept the downsides to this close relationship with the subjects, we must also accept the tremendous possibilities for understanding and successfully decoding the movement known as Stuckism, particularly in relation to Punk.

3.4 The Sound of the Suburbs

Jon Savage, a former *Sounds* journalist, discusses the beginnings of Punk in his book *England's Dreaming*, a key text covering the history of Punk rock:

The inevitable condemnations of Punk reflected its contradictory desires and stupidities, but they were couched in terms so biased and based on an implicit definition of social acceptability that was so restrictive, that it was easy to reject them. If you did so, the whole thing collapsed like a pack of cards. If you were a Punk, you suddenly found yourself a scapegoat, an outsider. This realization – part delicious, part terrifying – radicalized a small but significant part of a generation.

(Savage, 1991, p. 267)

This is accurate, and although important, Savage's book tells the story of Punk rock as though it is a story of London and its suburbs. This is just one story. Cobley remarks that 'No matter what Savage or other 'insiders' may

suggest, Punk rock first surfaced in the nation's consciousness with the aftermath of the Grundy interview in December 1976.' (Cobley, 1999, p.174)

The provincial experience often dictated, at that time, that there was a slower distillation of information when new ideas were being formed. Many London based commentators stated that Punk as an idea was all over by the end of 1976. For me it began at that time. Cobley says that '... if provincial Punk rock is less spectacular than it's London counterpart, this is no reason to write it out of history.' (Cobley, 1999, p.173)

I would argue that although it could be considered less spectacular, not only should it not be written out of history, but it should be celebrated in it's own right, and be considered at least as valid as the more well known, metropolitan story. Bestley talked about provincialism within Punk during my conversation with him...

In the provinces... and again, I like that term: provinces has that negativity about it, but I find it quite positive, I found we were doing our own version of things, our own interpretation of things, which I don't think was a negative. (Bestley in conversation with the author 2.9.11, London College of Communication)



Fig 7: Russell Bestley in his staff room at the London College of Communication

Cobly (1999) and Bestley (2007) are commentators with whom this writer identifies: they are discussing the experiences of perhaps 95% of those who called themselves Punks in 1977. Interestingly, as far as I can judge, perhaps only 5% of writings on Punk discuss this provincial idea, and even then it revolves very much around class or style, and not geography. Bestley backs up this observation in his paper from 2011 *From London's Burning to Sten Guns in Sunderland* when he references Gary Clarke:

This criticism of a static notion of subcultural style is reiterated in Gary Clarke's response to Hall and Jefferson's earlier *Resistance Through Rituals*. In 'Defending Ski-Jumpers', Clarke states, '[...] there is an uncomfortable absence in the literature of any discussion as to how and with what consequences the pure subcultures are sustained, transformed, appropriated, disfigured, or destroyed' (Frith and Goodwin 1990: 82). Hebdige's concern with the notion of authenticity and the 'innovators' of the punk movement is also brought into critical view by Clarke:

Hebdige concerns himself only with the innovative punks, the original 'authentic'

and 'genuine' punks concentrated in the London area. This is characteristic of most of the Centre's subcultural theory – it explains why certain youths develop a particular style say, in the East End, but youth subcultures elsewhere are usually dismissed as part of the incorporation and containment of the subversive implications of that style. We are never given reasons why youths 'in the sticks' are inclined to adopt a particular style. Hebdige's analysis begins with a heatwave in Oxford Street and ends in a Kings Road boutique. (1990: 86) (Bestley, 2011, p. 9)

Bestley talked about his time living in Tunbridge Wells in 1977...

My experience was, every so often, once a month, saving enough money to get into London to go to a gig, or to go to a record shop. (Bestley in conversation with the author 2.9.11, London College of Communication)

Billy Childish talks about his provincial experience during this time in his poem *Werk Victim 77*...

*none in the dockyard
new that i was escaping
and was never coming back
i haddnt even told my mother*

*i drank the tea she poured me
and dreamed
of the summer
when i would
paint pictures
to move the world*

travel to london

whatch

Punk bands

and let the world

wash me clean

(Childish, 2008, p. 23)

In terms of provincialism, TV Smith told his story of going to London, although he was suspicious of the validity of his provincial roots...

I don't particularly attach what we sounded like with where we came from. It could be that if we had been brought up in London we might have sounded like all the other bands playing in London or, it might be that if we had been all brought up in London we would have still been some sort of outsiders because there is nothing to say that if you feel like an outsider somewhere outside you're not also going to feel like an outsider when you're on the 'inside'. So it is impossible to say. I mean for me The Adverts was a vehicle for my own song writing and my own ideas which I thought were outsider ideas basically anyway, and to me the position of whereabouts in the country it happened are fairly irrelevant except in the sense that in London it was possible to put the band on in front of people in a scene that was actually happening and people were actually interested. Whereas in Torquay, no one gave a shit. (Smith in conversation with the author 29.3.08, London)

This disinterest was a common provincial experience – either that or an openly hostile one. There were areas in London that were accommodating, a

luxury the early provincial Punks did not have. They had to find their own places to play. Smith's notion of the outsider not depending on geography is understandable, it confirms what can be read in Muggleton and reveals the same element of Romanticism that seems to run through much of my own idea of the development of Punk.

It was clear that this provincial experience was becoming a key area for me, essentially the difference between the London experience and the provincial one. This experience related not just to myself, but also to a number of Stuckist artists. Cobley states:

What is important to remember about a provincial town such as Wigan in the 1970's is not just its physical distance from metropolitan centres but it's mental distance from them... It was in this milieu which I have telegraphically outlined – and probably many more like it – that Punk rock struggled to breathe. Furthermore, it is probably precisely because of this struggle that the fate of Punk rock in the provinces is so much more historic and emblematic than the comparatively glitzy phenomenon venerated in published accounts of London Punk.

(Cobley, 1999, p. 171-172)

Ming discussed this distance in my conversation with him:

SM Well it probably was provincial for me because I was in this tiny, well not tiny it is quite big now, but you know sort of like one horse town where nothing happened, Gravesend in Kent

PH right

SM And you know nothing has happened in Gravesend you know it has all happened in Medway or Maidstone or wherever but nothing has come out of Gravesend so it was pretty similar, so it was probably a similar experience, sort of, I mean, a great example was I was fourteen at the time, still at school and the headmaster sent around the whole school to every classroom a note saying when the bell rings don't let the kids out of class because there is a bunch of Punk rockers hanging outside the school gates on their scooters, we have called the police and us kids were sort of like, WOW we want to go and see them, you know it really was COR, you know, at last something dangerous, you know, for us kids, you know, I mean in London it was probably different obviously.

PH ... I feel like I kind of misunderstood Punk ... but it was a more kind of genuine authentic experience, for I really believed in it.

SM I still do

PH Well so do I and that is a very important thing, and what do you think were the elements of Punk when you first came across it that resonated with you so much?

SM Well I think for me what attracted me to Punk initially was because at the time you either had people who wore afghan coats and patched jeans or you wore hipsters with flares, you know disco boys and so they were the

uniforms and for me the impression I got was that Punk wasn't a uniform it was an individual thing, and ok you know you had Westwood and these designers doing all that boutique stuff, Sex shop sort of thing but for us in the provinces we understood that as long as you wasn't wearing that afghan coat or disco gear, you know, something totally different, you were a Punk. So what a lot of us used to do was go down the charity shop and get an old man's suit, maybe rip it up a bit and put a few badges in and hey presto you were a Punk.

PH And that was the part of the thing we did understand is that ok we may have gone to the charity shop and brought things, well we wouldn't have brought a suit with big flares and massive collars so there was a certain amount of uniform in it, but it was more about kind of saying it wasn't so much about what you dressed in it was about what you didn't dress in as much as anything.

SM Yeah, yeah, yeah

PH and I think that is very important and we didn't spend a lot of money on it and certainly I don't know about you, but I didn't think I was a part of a cutting edge fashion trend, I thought it was the opposite.

SM Yeah, yeah I totally agree, I sort of thought you know "this is total anti-fashion and it is total anti-everything."

(Ming in conversation with the author 6.2.11, Islington, London)

As a provincial Punk, I really believed in what I perceived to be the ideals of the movement, but it was a different belief system to that being lived in London. My personal interpretation was formulated from a number of sources, admittedly to a certain extent from Malcolm McLaren and *The Sex Pistols*, as they were the most visible, but without the contextualisation. McLaren was the manager of *The Sex Pistols*, and was instrumental in producing, along with his partner at the time, Vivienne Westwood, a visual look for Punk. Influenced by the aforementioned Situationist movement, which promoted provocative actions in an attempt to force social change, based on Marxist and Surrealist ideas, McLaren, along with Jamie Reid (later designer of *The Sex Pistols* record sleeves and general marketing) took part in a student occupation at the Croydon Art school, coinciding with the student riots in Paris. Some of what McLaren had learnt from Situationism was recycled when managing bands. *The Sex Pistols* themselves were the most visible of the Punk bands, notable for releasing the single *God Save The Queen* in 1977 during the Queen's Silver Jubilee celebrations.

Westwood had a clothing shop on the Kings Road in London called 'Let It Rock', later to become 'Sex'. In December 1976 round about the time *The Sex Pistols Anarchy in the UK* was released, Sex was renamed 'Seditionaries'. Westwood and McLaren were in fact fashion innovators, producing a new look generated from a variety of sources - this is well documented. *The Sex Pistols* clothes were expensive fashion items. They looked cheap and thrown together, but it was a carefully contrived look.

Provincial Punks were in reality simply taking on a new fashion trend. I was mostly unaware of the strong link between Punk and fashion - the whole idea of fashion for me was of a very superficial activity, as information was coming through about rejecting current trends and expressing oneself as an individual. This led me to ignoring the high street and buying from charity shops. As Cobley states:

The kind of Punk subculture that existed in the provinces, by contrast, did not have to work as hard to provide onlookers. As a result it tended to embody 'bricolage' and 'DIY' culture out of necessity and often for more private reasons rather than for the purposes of post-Westwood 'confrontation dressing' (Hebdige, 1979:107). (Cobley, 1999, p. 172)

'Confrontation dressing' is a term derived from Hebdige (1979) and it is clear that Cobley is contrasting the kind of 'DIY culture' I recall with the CCCS view of Punk. Reading Hebdige today you get no sense of the provincial experience of going out to see Punk bands when they managed to get to your area. Once again Cobley has the view from outside London firmly in his grasp: he quotes Osgerby...

This distance between provincial Punks and their metropolitan predecessors is stated nicely by Osgerby when he emphasizes the art school/middle class London-commuter belt background of those who frequented Punk clubs like The Roxy and The Vortex. 'Indeed' he adds, 'the "outsider" posture of Britain's initial Punk "moment" is best seen as a piece of radical theatre, a calculated attempt to enflame and outrage establishment sensibilities' (Osgerby 1998a)... One Wigan Punk rocker reports the way that 'the entire top deck of a passing bus gave me "the finger" as I set

out to see Slaughter and the dogs at Wigan Casino... Clearly, it was one thing to be a spectacular Punk rocker in the safety of a club in central London, and quite another to attempt to be one in a small provincial enclave. (Cobley, 1999, p. 172)

I recognize myself and many other non-London Punks in these descriptions. For example, Brian Young was a member of the Manchester Punk group 'Slaughter and the Dogs' and he has contrasted his provincial experience with that of someone growing up in London at that time:

As in London, a lot of the early 'Punks' were ex – Roxy Music trendy fashion victims who were that little bit older and had been to London and could afford the clothes. I doubt if many of them ever listened to Punk music, and a lot of 'em had soon moved on to whatever trend was next off the blocks. Meanwhile the rest of us couldn't have afforded a single Sex/Seditionaries T-shirt between all of us so it was DIY all the way. Sure, we all got it ever so slightly wrong, but in the process created something kinda unique and very special. (Robb, 2006, p. 252)

Many provincial Punks got it wrong, including myself. I had long come to terms with this misreading by the time I got involved in Stuckism, but initial research began to show that this was an experience shared by others, including Childish. He talked of getting it wrong during my conversation with him saying that

All that stuff that McLaren said is rubbish – he said it, we believed it, so it happened, but it happened because we had the misinformation and so it belongs to us not him. (Childish in conversation with the author 17.4.08, just off Farringdon Road, London)

This was another key point for me, because this original misinterpretation of what was happening in the London scene, a misinterpretation that took place essentially in the provinces, I thought, had led in later years to a belief system that could be seen in a number of different areas, including some of the Stuckist painters, and particularly within the Stuckist manifestos. Some of us had developed and taken ownership of a set of values different to that being practiced in London. This is important to acknowledge, as it simplifies the research when dealing with Punk as a philosophy. According to Bestley, he was...

bumping into Punks who were doing their own thing... they were kind of influenced by the London thing, and they weren't necessarily anti London, it's just that it was a different experience, from what had been captured in the books. (Bestley in conversation with the author 2.9.11, London College of Communication)

What was important about Punk was having the experience of Punk, or more pertinently, having *an* experience of Punk. The provincial experience has not been documented academically to as great a degree, although as we have seen, there are examples that have appeared more recently. It must be acknowledged that a subculture is essentially provincial in nature: we can go back as far as Hebdige's work for confirmation of that, but much of the writing

in this area is without the experience of actually being part of one. There is often a distance, a coldness within the writing, that does not fulfil. There also exists the dilemma of just how 'authentic' these provincial Punks were, compared to the 'innovators' (Hebdige 1979) involved in the London scene. Bestley writes...

The apparent paradox in the relationship between 'original' punks and 'hangers-on' is explored in detail by David Muggleton (2000), who questions the distinctions made by Hebdige and the CCCS regarding originality and authenticity; "...now let us attempt our own theoretical re-evaluation of what occurs "after the subculture has surfaced and been publicised" (Hebdige 1979: 122). We could assume this necessarily leads to the passive and collective acceptance of a commercially produced style. Or, alternatively, we could propose that such commodified subcultural styles, whether purchased new or obtained second-hand, continue to be customised and subverted. "Just as the innovators can construct new meanings for clothes or other symbols from the dominant culture, so too can members adapt and change the subcultural items for their own purpose and needs" (Andes 1998: 213). Why, then, should the option of further adaptation leading to heterogeneity be any less subversive than the actions of the original innovators? The answer, of course, is that it isn't, particularly when one further considers that some of the original adapters may also have adopted" (Muggleton 2000: 144). Thus, the notion of an authentic group of 'original' punks is brought into question, and the importance of later developments and interpretations is not overlooked. (Bestley, 2007, p. 45)

I asked Bestley what experiences were generally more peculiar to Punk as it was lived in the provinces, particularly for practitioners:

There was a certain lack of knowledge, and that led to some interesting takes on things, and I think that was something I was trying to celebrate [in my PhD] Partly it was lack of ambition, or opportunity... they were singing songs or making records about their own locality- they didn't have any vision that it would be anything more than that. (Bestley in conversation with the author 2.9.11, London College of Communication)

Childish showed his belief that because of his misunderstanding of Punk, through this weakness, lay his strength:

My problem is that I believed in what they said, or my saving grace was that I believed in what they said. I thought "ok you have to have a funny name" – I was Gus Claudius, and my mate said "no you're not you're Billy Childish, and you do things that are naughty... a proper British cheeky chap." We weren't political at all - I didn't know what the anarchy sign meant. (Childish in conversation with the author 17.4.08, just off Farringdon Road, London)

I would contend that Childish's memory of that time is common throughout much of the provincial Punk experience. I also believe it now to be an important aspect in the ideas and attitude behind Stuckism. Although the original 13 artists were named The London Stuckists, the metropolitan tag is one of convenience, as well as being a better marketing tool. Although not the only influence, as we shall see in the next chapter, I believe it permeates

throughout the manifestos, within the work, and the way Stuckism is promoted.

We could conclude that this story is only my story, and of no use or interest to anyone else. The media theorist Andy Medhurst discusses his dread of the student who professes to know what it was like during a particular period in history because they took part in it, in other words the 'I was there' argument. Medhurst believes that this claim is a pre-emptive strike 'that seeks to dismiss all the claims of retrospective thinking, all the writers and theorists who have subsequently put forward interpretations of cultural events, in favour of the apparently unchallengeable testimony of first hand experience.' (Medhurst, 1999, p. 220) Bestley gave his feelings on this issue in terms of his own research:

Part of my 'I was there' argument, if you like, that did come out... I think there's a subcultural internal language, there's a dialogue in the graphics, in the sleeves, there's a dialogue in the lyrics, there's something going on there, the bands are referencing other bands and talking about each other, that you can only know from being deeply involved with the subculture. I think it's very hard to understand that language as an external person who's coming to it. That's one thing that I did argue. (Bestley in conversation with the author 2.9.11, London College of Communication)

Medhurst goes on to discuss how teachers of popular culture (such as himself) are inevitably going to be 'confronted with the contradictory feelings generated by turning one's own past or present leisure activities into matters of intellectual debate, and indeed, those contradictions should, ideally, form part of the subject matter of what and how we study, offering a chance for productive self reflection.' (Medhurst, 1999, p. 220) However, he admits that 'This process often involves encountering readings of texts that deconstruct and even undermine the meanings they have for you, and in every case but one this causes me no grief. That exception, above all the other cultural forms and practices which have attracted me over the years, is Punk...' (Medhurst, 1999 p. 220) My findings lead me to believe that Punk is a special case, not just because I experienced it like Medhurst, but because it differed significantly to other subcultures before it, and that not only did it encourage participation as a practitioner, not just as a follower, but also because of its long lasting and wide ranging influence, including the growth of ideas such as Stuckism. This is why Punk is so hard to pin down, and why it has been called the last subculture: it is not about a style, or a fashion, or a discipline, but an attitude – it is about doing things in the right way for the right reasons.

In summary, then, we have discussed punk attitude and attempted to pin down the key elements that define it. We have then discussed it in relation to the provincial experience, and seen that there are similarities with those who had that experience, including some of the Stuckist artists. These findings take us into chapter four, where I elaborate on and investigate further the links

between Punk and Stuckism, as well as my own personal experiences with both movements.

Chapter 4: Punk and Stuckism

In this chapter I transform 1970s provincial Punk attitude, the experience that has shaped my own understanding of British subcultures, into a tool for exploring the rapid development of Stuckism over the past decade. This chapter is mostly concerned with the links that can be drawn between the Punk movement and the idea of being a Stuckist artist. Here my ambition, as suggested in the methodology chapter of this thesis, is to use the similarity between these two moments in recent subcultural history as a vehicle for understanding this sense of dissent. As with my discussion of Punk, my engagement with Stuckism is based on my own personal experiences. In order to introduce the reader to Stuckism I will begin by discussing some alternative precedents to the development of Stuckist ideas that rival the platform created by Punk.

4.1 Precedents

Thomson is older than Childish, and this has brought different influences into the equation. Thomson became involved with what we shall term the 'hippy movement' as a teenager, and retains elements of the idealistic approach from that time, when he was buying *Oz Magazine* and *International Times*^{viii}.

^{viii} Both magazines represented and documented the hippy movement in the late 60s.

Thomson had been buying and reading old copies of these magazines, similar in fact to my re reading of the New Musical Express:

when I was reading them and looking at them there was something in that period also, 67, 68, 69 that sort of period, there was something there that I wanted to find and reclaim because I felt it had got lost as well. There was sort of an incredible sense of enterprise and daring and outspokenness, and the creation of culture which had certain features that are lacking in today's culture. I mean in comparison, today is very stereotyped and conformist and that effects us, it effects me, you can't help being help being affected by that environment, and it is insidious. You have talked earlier about adverse effects and criticism from people, if that happens then it is going to affect you in some way and I felt that these people were homogenous, they identified with each other with values, with a total expression of those values in a really encouraging way, encouraging for us now, and it is kind of forgotten about, people don't know it happened and they certainly don't know what the experience was like at the time of it happening, which was an amazing one, and very similar to the experience people had a bit later with Punk. I think Stuckism would benefit if they had more of that experience in it. More confidence, more outspokenness, more enterprise, more events and what has happened ...

PH Or self belief, in what you are and what you are capable of.

CT Yesterday I got an email through from Alexis Hunter who used to be a pioneering feminist photographer from the 1970s and she has joined Stuckism because she said it was the only rebellious movement available nowadays, (Thomson in conversation with the author 15.1.09, Finchley, London)

There are therefore elements within Stuckist thinking that originate in the hippy movement.



Fig 8: Sexton Ming, Traci Emin, Charles Thomson, Billy Childish at the recording of The Medway Poets album

It is clear from my conversations with Thomson that some of the ideas evident within the Stuckist manifestos have been in place for many years. The Medway Poets are one example.^{ix} There are elements of the poet within Stuckist thinking, and Childish and Thomson would certainly recognize Robert

^{ix} This group consisted of Billy Childish, Bill Lewis, Charles Thomson, Miriam Carney, Rob Earl and Sexton Ming. Tracey (then Traci) Emin was never officially a member but was included on the album 'The Medway Poets', recorded at Rochester Adult Education Centre on 11 December 1987.

Crawford's assertion of the modern poet 'preserving in the face of the reductively analytical some access to the 'primitive', the world of dream, magic, wildness and 'marginality' which poetry both guards and offers'. (Crawford, 2001, p. 284) Crawford is talking about the poet working within the context of academic restrictions, but this could be translated as the Stuckist working within a culture dominated by conceptual art, of having to exist within the world of Sir Nicholas Serota's high modernism. These comments are significant in relation to my current position as I work within an academic context but have a history of being involved with movements that are suspicious of these communities.

The Medway Poets met around 1977 at Medway College of Art and Design, going on to perform live, also releasing a number of self-published books as well as the aforementioned album. As Thomson relates in the catalogue *The Stuckists Punk Victorian*: 'Driven on by Bill Lewis's fetish for all things Berlin Cabaret and the current Punk explosion, in 1979 we formed an anarchic poetry performance group named by Bill, The Medway Poets.' (Thomson, 2004, p.8) Ming discusses working with Childish in the late Seventies:

Me and Billy started writing poetry together and bringing out our own chapbooks. We'd staple them ourselves. Someone told me that there was one on e-bay going for £60! We used to give them away. I probably didn't know what I was trying to do with the poetry at the time, but looking back I suppose it was about the Punk ethic, anarchy. I don't mean anarchy politically but that idea of anything goes, rocking the boat a bit, that sort of thing

(<http://Punkdaddy.wordpress.com/tag/charles-thomson/> accessed 4.9.11)

According to Jim Shean in the book *the arts in the medway Volume One: The Medway Scene* (2004):

This gang of art school drop outs and punks cut through the sweet neck of the mainstream like a cheese wire ... My own memories of the Medways are particularly of Lewis and Thomson in performance in various venues in Medway. Their shows were electric, cutting edge and funny, entertaining and hard hitting, full of rage yet lyrical, personal and universal. (Shean, 2004, p. 10)

This description of the performances of the poets by Shean, Thomson would certainly use to describe the best Stuckist work. Thomson discussed the dynamics of this group during one of my conversations with him...

I mean there were very powerful connections between all of the people involved. We were essentially a community, even something of a family. I mean you do have that when you're younger I think, when you are at college you bond with people. We were just drawn together by some inexorable force because we were powerful and we needed that power that we had individually to share collectively. We had the same need to say something and to say it in a very similar way, which was directly and powerfully and originally and simply. And, of course, that's an idea that carried on into the Stuckists: we were doing the same thing at the time, we had a need to be honest.
(Thomson in conversation with the author 26.1.07, Finchley, London)

Thomson also discussed the influence of Punk on his performances:

Yeah, Punk attitudes changed our attitudes. It certainly changed my attitude. Probably less so for Bill Lewis, but Billy was a Punk rocker and I was just

massively into Punk. I can remember, I took a year off from college in the summer of 1977, I actually went down to Bath to live there for 6 months and I was writing poetry and Punk didn't come into it. But towards the end of that year or sometime at the beginning of the next year, my wife at the time, Andrea, got hold of an Iggy Pop^x album. I was really affronted, I thought it was decadent, I was quite put out and a bit angry that she was into this stuff because I wasn't. I had come up through the whole hippy thing and all the values, you know, the sort of peace and love, and this was kind of raw and visceral and aggressive and angry. Not that Iggy Pop was that angry, "Lust for Life", we are talking about, that one, not the earlier stuff, and I remember getting it at some point, it clicked, but I can remember getting the first Sex Pistols album and to me it just sounded the same all the way through and nothing to distinguish one song from the next and every song basically being equally bland, you know, kind of relentless, monotonous, lacking in any kind of emotional resonance. At a certain point it clicked, I got it, you know, the rhythms and the attitudes opened up something in me, which obviously I had been in denial of, as I wouldn't have got so hot under the collar about it in the first place. Some aspect of my shadow was opened up and I was just completely hooked, just totally hooked on this new cultural phenomenon: the ideas, the energy, the rhythm, the means of expression, the way you went about doing things, and it massively informed my poetry. I suppose one of the things was that it allowed aggression to come into it, which before had been forbidden. I didn't realise it had been forbidden, but obviously it had, you

^x Iggy Pop was a former member of the American band The Stooges, considered to be forerunners of the punk movement. He was solo by this time and was having a considerable degree of success in Britain.

know, because of the whole hippy thing. I suppose it's the first time I opened up to that and I remember also doing serious drawings. This may have been just before I went back to finish my final year at college or it might have been at the very beginning of it, but I did them crudely. I got a black wax crayon that was too big and drew because it stopped me being fiddly and it was immediate, it was like Punk music, it was 3 chords. My black wax crayon was the equivalent of the 3 chords and I would draw all these themes, and one of them was aggression. I drew Punk musicians like the Sex Pistols and this black crayon was like this aggression and this spontaneity and this immediacy of expression and communication, which I hadn't had before. I had been doing fine art, I had initially come from the basis of the Renaissance and that kind of skill, but it didn't move me, and working in this way did.

The poetry also became informed by it because that sort of aggression was getting into the poetry, that sort of shock value. So I wrote poems, things like "the middle class, the middle class, feel shame cos shit comes out their arse" and that was a poem. So the ideas, the emotions are opened up: "the day I join the golf club, just blow my boring brains out". I mean I wouldn't have written that kind of poetry before Punk at all. I was going emotionally through something very kind of appropriate for that mode of expression, because my marriage was getting bleaker and eventually ended up breaking up altogether, which was an amazingly harrowing time.

The way of performing it, again, it had that kind of aggression, it had that kind of "YEERRR, THE MIDDLE CLARSS, THE MIDDLE CLARSS, FEEL SHAME

cos shit comes out their arse". It was kind of a mixture of gentility and vulgarity because I could pull on both strings, and sometimes it was a question of the words and the meaning being shocking and the delivery being restrained and poised. (Thomson in conversation with the author 26.1.07, Finchley, London)

Childish had this to say on the Medway Poets:

BC The Medway Poets were not Punk. There was one Punk in the Medway Poets and that was me. Sexton liked Punk music but he definitely wasn't a Punk as a kid, he had very broad tastes in music, very broad tastes. Bill Lewis, half the time he wanted to be a Jew... Charles was just a hippy. It was a very, very bizarre group of individuals who shouldn't have been together and that is what was interesting. It was much more interesting than a Punk performance group.

PH Well exactly, because when I speak to Charles about it how it started, to him it seemed the most normal thing in the world for 5 or 6 poets to find each other and start a group. In the polytechnic that I went to I didn't know a poet in the whole place, perhaps I didn't come across one, but I think it is amazing that so many poets congregated in the same place.

BC It didn't really work like that, the way that it happened was a bloke called Rob Earl was a childhood friend of Bill Lewis and they were

interested in poetry, and Bill came across me in the Medway because I published fanzines and I put some poetry in them and I was writing lyrics and was interested in Dadaism and started doing these silly nursery rhymes, and he said “do you want to come along and read and I read 4 or 5 poems?” I went along to his college and read these Dadaist poems on the canteen table at lunchtime and I think Rob Earl was sent some poems by Sexton, and Charles had some dealings with this English teacher who was a right reactionary bastard called Alan Denman who taught us English, and he wanted to organise some readings and he organised some readings in a pub and I went along, Bill went along so Rob came along, Charles came along, Sexton was invited by Rob because he had sent him some poems. So that is how you got this strange group of people, largely because of some dodgy English teacher at art college and Bill Lewis. Bill was the one with the enthusiasm and the idea of having them in the pub where he wanted them to be and Charles is a great organiser, so once he was in place he was going to do this, that and the other and I think he saw it as a way to promoting his dream of who he is to other people, which isn't an evil thing to do because that's what a lot of people do. (Childish in conversation with the author 17.4.08, just off Farringdon Road, London)

Although, as often with Thomson and Childish, there are differences in interpretation (Ming, for example, considers himself a Punk), there exists a clear link between this period of time and subsequent thinking in relation to

the Stuckist manifestos. The anger and aggression within punk attitude can be seen in the way Childish in particular later used the idea of a manifesto as an aggressive attack on contemporary British art.

Group Hangman and the manifestos that came from it for example, can be seen both as a result of punk attitude, and also as a forerunner to Stuckism. This group consisted of Billy Childish, Traci Emin, Sheila Clark and Sanchia Lewis, and was originally conceived by Emin in order to sell woodcut prints. In 1997, Childish reinstated the group to promote painting over conceptual art. In the manifesto from 7.7.97 (Hangman Communication 0001) we can see clear precedents within the statements, including the opening statement: 'Crimes of the future: The role of the artist against conceptualism and the idiocy of ideas.' Point 12 states:

The conceptual artist arrives on the scene and frozen with fear, like some anal retard, is too scared to transmute their ideas into paint and commence a string of unacceptably pathetic canvases and thereby experience themselves as crap. It is essential for every artist to paint a succession of unacceptably bad paintings.
(no author Wise, Lewis, Howard, and Jordan, Eds. 2004, p. 15)^{xi}

Thomson had stayed heavily involved in poetry during this time. Thomson had become disillusioned with art, being the first student to fail his course at Maidstone College of Art in ten years. As Thomson related to me...

^{xi} The names put to this manifesto are Billy Childish, Dan Melchior, Kyra De Coninck, Sexton Ming, Wolf Howard, Sheila Clark, Philip Absolon, Mark Lowe, Chris Broderick and Eugene Doyen.

I gave up painting for 15 years and in that time I didn't just give up painting my own art, I gave up art full stop. I didn't go to exhibitions, I didn't read about art, I didn't take any interest in art, it didn't have any relevance to my life at all. So I had no idea about Brit Art, I didn't know about it, I didn't know it existed, I don't think I even knew about Damien Hirst and his shark. It wasn't on my radar screen, I mean I was involved with poetry, I was getting a lot of stuff published in children's poetry anthologies, I had work in over 100 anthologies, I was doing performances, I visited 700 different schools in a 13-year period. That was my life, you know: if I went to an artistic function it was an evening at a publishers with children's poets, and I knew I was up there with the leading children's poets, which is a very good place to be. I mean they are very good writers in their field and I had more generosity and goodwill than a lot of the people one meets in the art world. (Thomson in conversation with the author 26.1.07, Finchley, London)

He also discussed his thinking when deciding to paint again:

PH So, you're painting and you said that you realised that if you were going to paint, if you were going to be an artist, that it wasn't enough to just paint, that you were going to take on the whole art establishment. Why did you come to that conclusion? What was your issue with it, why was it not enough for you to just paint?

CT I had a very strong sense that if I did my art, it wouldn't be enough on its own to achieve the kind of recognition or exposure that I wanted to get for it because of the prevailing climate in the art world. Now, having said that, I didn't know what the prevailing climate in the art world was, I now realise, but I did know what it had been at college, 20 years previously, because I had the same problems and I was basically doing Stuckism then. The dominant mode was fine art; it was sort of still wedged in with abstract expressionism I suppose. You were allowed to do certain kinds of figurative things if it was a bit sort of slick in some ways. The Head of Department did photo silk screens of the bomb bays of American jets if I recall correctly. Slightly Warholish, that would have been great, but what wasn't so good was to do traditional type landscapes, but you still passed. I managed to completely get up their nose and be the only person to fail in 10 years by doing my proto-Stuckist work.

PH You were saying that there was a manifesto on the Stuckism website that you actually wrote at college. So you wrote a manifesto on crude art whilst you were at college.

CT Yes- when I was at college I developed my own artistic philosophy, which is kind of based a bit on Punk, and this must have been the end of '78. I developed my own early crude form of Stuckism and it was called Crude Art, and my idea was that you should dispense with the fine art. There were two extremes, there was commercial art which was

sold to the mass public and there was kind of elitist art which was for the art world that the public didn't appreciate and I wanted something in the middle, I wanted something raw and direct. I wrote this manifesto, which you can read, called Crude Art, and it said that the overriding concern before technique was the expression of the human spirit. I mean some of it could have been taken out of the Stuckism manifesto and I did these paintings fairly straightforwardly, a bit like the ones I'm doing now – in fact I'll show you them. (Thomson in conversation with the author 26.1.07, Finchley, London)

CRUDE ART

The Crude Art Society was founded in 1978 for the purpose of providing original works of art at an inexpensive price, in line with modern marketing procedures. Our range currently includes paintings and prints, all of which are hand-produced by our own artists, and are accompanied by a certificate of authenticity.

Crude Art fills the gap between the mass-produced, cheap, but superficial works currently found in many department stores, and the more searching, but elitist and costly, 'gallery' type of art. We aim to provide for the appreciator of art who would like to own original contemporary work, but finds his requirements can be met by neither of these two sources.

"Why 'Crude' art?", you may ask. We believe in a committed response to life, and an awareness of today's situation and problems. Society and art have reached a stage where 'sophistication' and 'skill' are no longer honourable attributes. They are easily obtainable with the help of current technology, and are used both industrially and artistically to conceal a poverty of content. Crude Art is the protest of individuality against these conformist pressures. For us, the exploration and expression of the human spirit, with whatever techniques are necessary, are the over-riding priorities.

Fig 9: Thomson's Crude Art manifesto

According to the Stuckism website:

This manifesto was written by Charles Thomson in 1978, when he was a student, and posted on a studio wall in Maidstone Art College. It was printed in a limited unnumbered edition on a Roneo duplicating machine, using a paper stencil. The title lettering was cut out of the stencil, and the imprint of the printing drum fabric can be seen on the letters "ART". The influence of some of the ideas in the manifesto can be seen in the Stuckist manifestos co-written in 1999 and 2000 with Billy Childish.

(<http://www.stuckism.com/Manifestos/CrudeArtManifesto.html> 9accessed 7.6.11)

It is tempting within this thesis to compare Thomson to Malcolm McLaren, and in some respects this has relevance. His method of promoting Stuckism is often metropolitan in approach, and he is skilled in this area. By metropolitan, I mean activities such as developing links with the London and national press, looking to place controversial stories in the press in order to promote Stuckism (including 'human interest' stories about his life with the artist Stella Vine, whom Thomson was briefly married to), and generally showing an understanding of how this type of activity can place an idea into the public consciousness. The differences with McLaren far outweigh the similarities however. A more interesting comparison would be with the little known Frank Rutter.

ALLIED ARTISTS' ASSOCIATION.

9, DUKE STREET, ADELPHI, LONDON, W.C.2.

Committee of Management :

JACOB EPSTEIN. ALEXANDER JAMIESON.
CHARLES GINNER. FRANK RUTTER.

The only Art Society in England without a Selecting Jury. Artists and Craftworkers have the right to show any three works they please at the annual exhibition on payment of the subscription (£2 2s.).

The next London Salon of the Association will be held at the **GRAFTON GALLERIES** in July.

Rules of Exhibition and full particulars may now be obtained from the
SECRETARY, ALLIED ARTISTS' ASSOCIATION, 9, DUKE ST., ADELPHI, LONDON, W.C.2.

FORM OF APPLICATION.

To the Committee of Management,
ALLIED ARTISTS' ASSOCIATION,
9, Duke Street, Adelphi, London, W.C.2.

I wish to become an Associate of the Allied Artists' Association and forward herewith my subscription (Two Guineas) for the current year.

Name (in full) Mr.
Mrs.
Miss)
Address.....

Date.....19.....

Fig 10: application form to show work with the Allied Artists' Association

Rutter was a British art critic, curator and activist, who became an art critic for *The Sunday Times*. He was an early champion in England of modern art, founding the French Impressionist Fund in order to buy work for the national collection. He also started the Allied Artists' Association to show 'progressive' art, as well as publishing its journal, *Art News*, stated as being the first art newspaper in the United Kingdom. (Sickert, Gruetzner, 2003) Rutter observed that advertising imagery was seen by far more people than work in art galleries, and he noted a new realism after the period of abstract experiment, praising the work of Dod Proctor as a complete presentation of twentieth century vision. Thomson is much maligned, not least by Childish and other

current and former Stuckist artists, for his attempts to use the media in order to promote Stuckism, but here we can see an approach that is particular to Thomson's.

There are also comparisons that can be made with The Brotherhood of Ruralists, who promoted figurative painting and denounced Minimalism. (Martin, 1991) Although the Ruralists never wrote a manifesto, there were several attempts to write one. Peter Blake, the British Pop artist and one of the founders of the Ruralists, at the time discussed ideas seen later in Stuckism:

Our aims are to paint about love, beauty, joy, sentiment and magic. We still believe in painting with oil on canvas, putting the picture in the frame and hopefully, that someone will like it, buy it and hang it on their wall to enjoy it.

(Grunenberg, 2007, p. 92)

Interestingly, this simple and gentle wish received significant criticism from the critics in much the same way as has happened with Stuckism. As Grunenberg documents, 'The Brotherhood had formed, as Blake explained, 'gently and innocently', and they countered the critical negativity that was an inherent force in the arts of the 1970s, based on radical theory and political activism challenging the very foundations of the institutions of art, with a disarmingly affirmative message.' (Grunenberg, 2007, p. 95) This battle between the 'self-declared' avant-garde and the Ruralists led to arguments in *The Guardian* newspaper, with Blake accusing leading critics as being destructive and negative about almost all the art they reviewed from 'the safety of their

establishment newspapers.’ (Grunenberg, 2007, p. 95) The critic Richard Cork was clearly angry at Blake’s stance, describing it as ‘a retreat into salacious cloud-cuckoo-land’ (Grunenberg, 2007, p. 95) going on to call it a sad decline for Blake. It prompts one to wonder what it is about figurative painting that upsets critics so much. There are clear connections with the Ruralists, both with the Stuckist stance as regards figurative painting, and the way critics have attacked that stance. Blake saw connections with the Ruralists and the Pre-Raphaelites, and this connection could also be carried through to Stuckism. I will now turn to my own engagement with Stuckism.

4.2 My introduction to Stuckism



Fig 11: cover of *The Sunday Times Culture Magazine* 1.8.99

I first encountered Stuckist ideas by way of an article in *The Sunday Times Culture Magazine* from 1.8.99, written by Rose Aidin. At this time I was painting small, square pictures in acrylic on watercolour paper, but had just begun experimenting on canvas. In retrospect I was treating these pieces differently from my works on paper. It is clear now that I was intimidated by canvas, as I attempted to address contemporary ideas within British art and incorporate them into the paintings, something I had not done with the works on paper. Although still clearly figurative in nature, I attempted to force ideas onto the canvas- in my works on paper I hadn't worried about ideas, but just painted what I felt like painting. With the pieces on canvas, I began to feel inadequate as an artist, and in fact did not feel like an artist at all. With the works on paper, I also didn't feel like an artist, as I felt they were lacking in the intellectual rigour and conceptual approach that I imagined contemporary art needed to have. I loved painting but thought I was a bad painter.

It is generally accepted that one is open to new ideas or beliefs when one's confidence is low – this can be seen in the way religious groups and other cults are able to recruit new members through 'coercive persuasion'. (Cordón, 2005 p. 46) It was at this time that I read *The Sunday Times* article. Stuckism has indeed been compared to a cult, with Charles Thomson as its 'sinister leader', a notion which became fashionable for critics to pursue, and well documented by Thomson himself in the catalogue for the View Two show in Liverpool, *An Antidote to the Ghastly Turner Prize* when discussing Ella Gurus painting *The Stuckists Last Supper*.

CHARLES THOMSON: In 2004, Andrew Billen in *The Times* said that Stella Vine saw the Stuckists as “a misogynistic cult” and I had “hypnotic charms”. In June 2007, in the *Sunday Times*, Waldemar Januszczak said Stella accused me of exercising “mystical powers” over her. In July 2007, Rachel Campbell-Johnston in *The Times* – by an amazing coincidence also writing about Stella – said we are a “clamorous cult” and I am your “sinister leader”. A week later, on the Saatchi site, Ana Finel Honigman called me “the universally perceived dodgy founder of the stuckists”; she was interviewing... no prizes for guessing who. The press seem rather gullible to swallow whatever Stella says as if it’s gospel, talking of which... was that the sort of thing you meant by “disciples” or is there even more that I’ve missed? (Guru, 2010, p. 137)

The Sunday Times article needs to be discussed at some length, as it relates to many elements of this paper. Ideas, attitudes and perceptions are developed that are a microcosm of future perceptions surrounding Stuckism. Quotes from Thomson and Childish also show an approach that relates to Punk, for example the use of crude and basic language in order to put ideas across. Thomson, for example, talks of being opposed to ‘any so-called art which incorporates dead animals or tents’, and goes on to discuss Tracey Emin’s nomination for the Turner Prize: ‘She’ll probably win the Turner Prize, and I’m sure she deserves it, because the Turner Prize is for people doing the sort of thing she’s doing – Brit Shit art.’

Aidin, the writer of the piece, remarks on ‘the Stuckists’ deeply eccentric behaviour’ and how she can ‘understand Emin’s frustration with them’. Clearly for Aidin, showing an unmade bed in a gallery is not eccentric, whereas criticising it is, but more importantly, for someone such as myself who had been through Punk, Thomson and Childish did not come across as eccentric

at all. They were using the same language towards conceptual art that the Punks had used when discussing the merits or otherwise of progressive rock. Thomson goes on to say that 'Cleverness has nothing to do with creativity or art... artists have got to be brave enough to make mistakes.' Childish elaborates: 'Kurt Schwitters understood that you had to paint really bad portraits, and he'd run a mile from these posturing businessmen called artists. We need an amateur society – whose mortgages don't depend on what they are doing – and they can make great leaps. Stuckism is a movement about figurative painting; we're interested in having the courage to do bad pictures and in appearing to be stuck.' Childish has always been open about his influences. Nine years after this piece I spoke to him and nothing had really changed:

One thing that I could say about the Stuckists and my interest in art and doing the Stuckists is that I am a great fan of the Dadaists and I was inspired by the Dadaists as a young man and that's why I like manifestos and that's why I like surreal contradiction and I am a big fan of Kurt Schwitters, and I do like Duchamp's first pieces. I think they are really amazing and good fun, and this is one of the reasons that I am against conceptual art because I found it to be like, when it was being embraced so easily by the establishment, to me it was devaluing swear words. It was devaluing the language of art, because I like anti-art because it is contentious and against the system, and I find that good fun... My contention is that Duchamp would be painting watercolours if he could see what was happening now. You know, because you are not trying to be reactionary, you are just trying to keep people and yourself awake.

(Childish in conversation with the author 17.4.08, just off Farringdon Road, London)

There is clearly a deep love for the ideas of Dada within Childish. Far from dismissing the idea of conceptual art, he cares deeply enough to be angry at what he sees as its devaluation by Brit Art, much as Punks felt that the ideas of rock and roll had been devalued by the super groups of the mid-Seventies.

Humour was an important aspect of Dada, and here we see an example of Thompson's and Childish's shared beliefs seven years after Childish left the Stuckists, as Thompson stated in the Aidin piece that 'Stuckism is not a joke, but it includes humour in a more generous way than most contemporary art.'

Aidin writes:

At the heart of Brit Art's problem is its addiction to novelty, Thompson says. "Brit Art is symptomatic of western materialistic culture; it's change for the sake of it. The further it goes, the thinner it gets."

I believe this is what Jacques Barzun was warning about when he stated in 1973 that...

Nowadays anything put up for seeing or hearing is only meant to be taken in casually. If it holds your eye and focuses your wits for even a minute, it justifies itself and there's an end of it... What I am bringing up for scrutiny, that if modern man's most sophisticated relation to art is to be casual and humorous, is to resemble the attitude of the vacationer at the fairgrounds, then the conception of Art as an all-important institution, as a supreme activity of man, is quite destroyed. One cannot have it both

ways – art as a sense tickler and a joke is not the same art that geniuses and critics have asked us to cherish and support. Nor is it the same art that revolutionists call for in aid of the revolution.

(Barzun, 1973, p. 17)

It is interesting to note, in relation to Barzun's example of the "vacationer at the fair grounds" that in 2006 Tate Modern exhibited a work by Carsten Höller in the Turbine Hall that was essentially a slide. According to the Tate website:

For Carsten Höller, the experience of sliding is best summed up in a phrase by the French writer Roger Caillois as a 'voluptuous panic upon an otherwise lucid mind'. The slides are impressive sculptures in their own right, and you don't have to hurtle down them to appreciate this artwork. What interests Höller, however, is both the visual spectacle of watching people sliding and the 'inner spectacle' experienced by the sliders themselves, the state of simultaneous delight and anxiety that you enter as you descend.

(<http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/exhibitions/carstenholler/> accessed 21.8.11)

During this time, the Tate publicised how many members of the public had been through its doors whilst the installation was on show. I would argue (*a la* Barzun) that, if turning Tate into a theme park in order to encourage more visitors is acceptable, then the Stuckists are right in questioning the thinking behind this.

Aidin also gives what is the first critique of Stuckist work within print when she writes of being...

glad (that) Childish says Stuckist pictures are bad – to me they seem quite awful, some by untrained artists, such as Sexton Ming's clumsy exploration of the difficulties of his transvestite existence; Philip Absolon's "outsider artist" rendering of skeletons decaying in a job centre; and Thompson's crude reworkings of Gainsborough's portraits.

Descriptions such as 'crude' and 'awful' crop up regularly when critics talk about Stuckist art. Thomson, as we have seen, even used the word himself when a student. It could be considered that words such as these denote an emotional as opposed to a considered approach to criticism. This type of criticism also relates very closely to the response to Punk. Although it has to be accepted that popular music criticism does tend towards the emotional, never the less with Punk criticism it was combined with anger. Some writers who had developed through the hippy movement of the late Sixties and the progressive movement of the Seventies found it hard to come to terms with the rawness, or crudeness of Punk music.

All of the elements outlined above had an effect on me as an artist who was painting, but had no direction or belief in my practice. I felt I recognised a Punk philosophy within Stuckist ideas immediately. Particularly exciting for me was Childish talking about needing to have the courage to paint bad pictures. As a Punk in 1977, I had the courage to make bad music and to go up on stage and perform it. I realised that I had been feeling the same about contemporary art as a 40 year old as I had about contemporary music as a pre Punk 16 year old: disliking current trends, not believing in them or feeling

them, but at the same time being intimidated by them. Feeling of little worth and working with fear was a natural state of mind.

In terms of the work however, it was Thompson's and not the work of Childish that resonated the most. His work was severely figurative but not illustrative; it had pop elements but was not Pop Art. It had no connection with work influenced by graffiti art and manga, work that would later be termed 'underground' or 'street art'. It was graphic, like my own, but had painterly qualities. And it was mysterious.

I had formulated a number of similarities with Punk and Stuckism - to me they were obvious, and I assumed them to be obvious to anyone with a similar set of cultural references. This was a misconception however, as early discussions around Stuckism had shown critics, writers and commentators had come to very different conclusions. A common reason was that Stuckism, at the beginning of this research, was still a new concept in art history terms. Stuckism also attacked the aforementioned critics, writers and commentators (we cannot include academics here, as no academic writing had actually been completed on Stuckism at this time), so there was an agenda within the negative criticism. I had to ensure that, as discussed before, I wasn't also working with an agenda.

The connections were mainly relating to actions as opposed to the philosophical ideas underpinning these actions:

- The Stuckists use simple, direct and, sometimes, crude language in order to communicate to an audience. Punk had a similar approach, with a basic form of language being used in interviews, as well as simple, direct lyrics that communicated to an audience.

- Most Stuckist work consists of small paintings, quickly produced, as opposed to the rather cumbersome activity of placing a shark in a tank (Damien Hirst) or making a Christ on the Cross from cigarettes (Sarah Lucas). The immediacy of the 7" single returned as a relevant format during the height of Punk- previously the album format had been prominent. Some bands, such as Led Zeppelin, even refused to release singles as they thought it an irrelevance.
- The Stuckists produce figurative paintings, and believe it to be the best means in which to communicate to an audience. Punk saw the return of the picture sleeve to 7" single packaging, as the industry saw how seductive 'pictures' could be.
- Both movements promoted the idea of the 'emperor having no clothes' as a part of their approach, and attacked specific individuals.
- Both movements had a DIY ethic.
- Stuckism attempts to debunk the mystery of the current scene (conceptual art), Punk attempted to debunk the mystery of the current scene at that time (progressive rock).
- Both movements having a lack of overall style.

There was also the anger, and just as importantly, the language, used to display this anger from establishment critics towards Punk. Critics, to me, seemed to be displaying a similar approach in their lack of informed, illconsidered judgements when discussing Stuckism, with again anger being prominent. So, although there is anger from both sides, I would contend that the anger from the Stuckists is calculated, that it is considered, informed, and aimed at a clearly defined set of ideas, and the individuals that promote these ideas. This calculated anger is made public aggressively through the manifestos and use of the media. The critics anger however, is often ill informed and uncontrolled, and consequently, of little worth as an objective appraisal of Stuckism.

4.3 Thomson and Childish - the same but different



Fig 12: Billy Childish at the Aquarium Gallery in North London on the evening after the conversation, which took place 5 minutes walk away in a busy café one lunchtime.



Fig 13: Charles Thomson's kitchen in East Finchley, where all the conversations took place.

As I have already discussed, the relationship between many of the protagonists involved in the journey from the Medway Poets to the Stuckists could be considered a dysfunctional one. There was always a rivalry between them, and this is evident when we look at the relationship between Childish and Thomson. Both take what they see as an honest approach when discussing each other publicly. Thomson is certainly a complex personality, and I believe much misunderstood within contemporary fine art circles. Childish believes this is due in part to his disinterest in how he is perceived:

Charles is a lawyer and not an artist and he is a very difficult person to win in an argument and he is very tenacious and he is not worried about what people think about him, which to a degree most people are. Which is a very strong situation to be in but also a weak situation, because it means you can

be very principled and only worry about what you are talking about and not be worried about personal attack, but, unfortunately, you will make a vast amount of enemies. (Childish in conversation with the author 17.4.08, just off Farringdon Road, London)

There is another area that Childish discusses however...

Charles for me is really simple, Charles one-to-one, no problem – Charles socially, I am not interested. And this is what happened in the Medway Poets. Charles I think has great difficulty in the world. (Childish in conversation with the author 17.4.08, just off Farringdon Road, London)

Meeting with Thomson is always an intense experience, but often a rewarding one. Both Thomson and Childish need control, but Childish is charming with it:

Well I am a show off and the other thing is that I am charismatic which is handy. If I think I am charismatic and I use it cynically, then I am a bastard then that's all I am, then I am a dipshit as well, but luckily for me I have some substance as well. (Childish in conversation with the author 17.4.08, just off Farringdon Road, London)

Thomson would state that it is Childish who has the difficulty, and that Childish has essentially worked alone as an artist, needing total control, whereas Thomson has worked with many other Stuckists over a long period

of time on a number of difficult projects. Some artists and curators he has worked with would admit to it being a difficult process however.

It is remarkable that Childish and Thomson have ever been able to work together. Childish believes that founding Stuckism with Thomson is the worst thing he ever did, and this leaves Thomson in a potentially vulnerable position. Essentially, Childish is 'liked' more, and consequently achieves a greater deal of respect within the art community. He has also been what is commonly termed "a cult figure" for a number of years. Childish refuses to leave the provinces, and has subsequently made Chatham and the Medway a provincial point of interest. Childish encourages this, for example by naming the book documenting his work as an artist, *Paintings of a Backwater Visionary*. Childish celebrates his provincialness.

Although Childish left the group in 2000, he is still seen as a vital element in the growth of Stuckism. During *Unknowable but Certain*, Childish's ICA show (and corresponding New York show at White Columns) in 2010, Ben Davis in Artnet magazine stated that:

Now and always, however, Childish will likely be best remembered in the visual arts as co-founder, with Charles Thomson, of the anti-avant-garde movement known as Stuckism, in 1999 (the name derives from a poem by Childish).

(<http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/reviews/davis/billy-childish4-9-10.asp> accessed 5.9.10)



Fig 14: the audience watches a video of Childish at his ICA show, 2010

Thomson enjoyed this comment. There is no doubt however, that Childish has gone on to be a significant name since we had our conversation. I did in fact talk with him about this possibility at the time:

It was the same when we were doing the Stuckists and we were doing the group, I said to Charles that everything that is being said here will happen but you will not get any credit for it and it will happen with other people doing it. The Triumph of Painting shows by Saatchi, I predicted at the very beginning of the Stuckists and I said we won't have any paintings in it, there is a rule in the world, the first mouse doesn't get the cheese, he gets his head in the trap.

PH Absolutely, but I think you are quite close to getting recognition on a large scale though aren't you really?

BC I am always at that point (laughs).

PH Yeah but I really think there seems to be, I mean I haven't got any hard evidence, but it is just a feeling you get, where you feel that there is a push on somewhere either from your end or the critics end where you feel that you are going to be placed higher.

BC Lots of people have said for quite a long time, you know, I have been championed in a way all of my life, because getting into Art College having no skills and people have always said that I will receive recognition and some people say that I am someone who would be much happier to receive recognition when I am dead and there are a few people around who are just trying to get it for who I am. But people have said to me that my position is assured and no one can pretend that I haven't done what I have done forever. But that is good fun because I like recognition, but it's not been, I want recognition for the things I have done and the reason I have done them and not to gain recognition and I want it to be seen that, I mean those things in the re-modernist manifesto, I really mean them. I want a spiritual renaissance in art and life and probably life and art. I want that we go somewhere where I think someone should be making your clothes, an adult should be making them and should be paid for it and we shouldn't have cheap, throwaway things and I think that we should have religion in our country, spirituality in our country that gives guidance to people as to how to behave in a sociable manner and I don't expect it to work but I

think we need it. My son, I speak to him intelligently and reasonably about things and ideas about doing the right, correct thing and he responds really well to it and he understands the idea and anyone will because people are inherently moral and we don't like doing the wrong thing and it is really good to put people in charge who say you are meant to do the right thing, because people love limitations because it gives them all the room to do what they need to do. This is it, there is no fun, when I had the Stuckist argument the poem of Tracey at that time, she said the art you like is all old fashioned and this is new happening and I said this is tired Dadaism and I said it's like the man has been kicked off the horse in 1916 and you're stamping on his head, I said you should be helping him back onto his horse. Once he is off the horse, we help him back on again. You know, we have had our fun now we help him on again otherwise we can't knock him off again. It should be this awareness. The Dadaists said that life should be a moving target, I am sure I did not make that up. (Childish in conversation with the author 17.4.08, just off Farringdon Road, London)



Fig 15: the author at the Billy Childish ICA show, 2010

The fashion has been for Childish to be compared to William Blake, an idea that Childish quietly encourages. He told me cautiously when I spoke to him about this comparison:

I think it is actually quite, with my limited knowledge of his work, I think it is quite fitting because it's not actually a superficial observation because there is no superficial thing that makes him fit, because usually you are Frank Spencer if you wear a beret. I think it is doing a lot of work on your own, in the way that you do it and being quite prolific and having some view that it's got a [pause] you are putting something in that needs to be put in... (Childish in conversation with the author 17.4.08, just off Farringdon Road, London)

In October 2005 *The Times* newspaper called Childish 'The William Blake of the Medway',

(http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/music/cd_reviews/article574900.ece accessed 13.9.11), again a term acknowledging his provincial stance. In *Billy Childish a Short Study* by Neal Brown, this comparison is continued:

Childish certainly has what seems to be a complete fearlessness in causing social displeasure through protest, and which puts him in the company of others who have been regarded as indecently frank, such as William Blake, D.H Lawrence and Robinson Jeffers (Neal, 2008, p. 37)

This comparison with Blake is interesting, as I believe I was witness to the first time this comparison was made, and may have been the conduit by which this idea was claimed and promoted by Childish. Tim Marlow, the television art critic, was a visitor at *The Stuckists Punk Victorian* show at The Walker art gallery in Liverpool in 2004, and I happened to be in the gallery whilst he was there. He immediately set about criticising the show, stating that it had all been done before, and that the argument we had with the art establishment was a pointless one, as painting was not the poor relation, and the John Moores exhibition next door proved it. He then, because an acquaintance of his had been praising my work, pointed towards it and stated, not realising that the artist was present, that there was a Patrick Caulfield painting next door that was no different to my work.

He also stated that the most interesting member of the Stuckists had left the group, namely Billy Childish, whom he saw as a 'William Blake figure'. I

related this story to Thomson, and he subsequently told Childish about it.

Since then this relating of the two has become common practice. There may even be a truth to it.

Despite the many public tensions between the co-founders of Stuckism, it is clear that Thomson and Childish are in constant touch, often working for each other. This fact indicates how much of the gossip generated by journalists and critics is misinformed.

4.4 Stuckism as Conceptualism

An element of Stuckist thinking surrounds the question of what constitutes an artwork, and takes what some would see as a controversial stance when stating that certain artworks are not, in fact, art. Although discussing the validity of an object as art is not a key element of this paper, it is worth noting that this is not an uncommon stance among academics, (and consequently not controversial stance), although there is admittedly much debate surrounding this difficult question.

Davies in his book *Art and Essence (studies in Art, Culture, and Communities)* uses the Stuckist demonstrations as an opportunity to discuss this problem, and is one of the earliest mentions of Stuckism within an academic context:

In contrast to Carney, Levinson, and Stecker, who aim to provide conditions that are both necessary and sufficient for an object to count as an artwork, Carroll (1993a, 324) identifies the primary task of the philosophy of art as that of providing a means to identify new objects as artworks. This is slightly misleading, insofar as he suggests that philosophy of art itself provides, or should provide, the means by which avant-garde objects will become accepted as artworks. In fact, on Carroll's account, it is historians of art who effect the acceptance of avant-garde objects as artworks, via historical narratives that identify relations between already established artworks and these new objects...

Historians of art identify these or other relations between the new, putative artwork and previously established artworks, thereby demonstrating that the new object is part of the evolving cultural practice that is art and, hence, deserving of inclusion in the tradition. (Davies, 2003, p. 170-171)

Davies suggests that there is an implication, when using this concept, of the artwork not having been one previously, but goes on to say that according to Carroll, this would be a 'misreading', and quotes Carroll:

identifying narratives establish the credentials of something that is already art.

Identifying narratives do not, so to say, turn nonartworks (or not-yet-artworks) in to artworks (1994, 14 fn). (Davies, 2003, p. 171)

This implies therefore, that an unmade bed such as Tracey Emin's *Bed*, 1996, has always been a work of art, but it needed contextualising to be generally seen as such. Davies suggests that this stance therefore implies that the main role of telling a historical narrative, relating an object to previous artworks, is merely to counter the suspicion that the object in question is not an artwork. (Carroll, 1994) As Davies notes however, the question not being asked is

whether or not the right sort of historical narratives are told about an object. (Davies, 2003) The Stuckists would argue that these historical narratives, put forward by some art historians relating to work the Stuckists dismiss, is flawed. Davies discusses Carrolls theories further, and states:

So Carroll's account seems to entail that, if an artifact stands in a relation of exemplification, amplification, or repudiation to already established art, then it is an artwork. Such relations are construed by Carroll as intentional ones. To qualify as an identifying narrative, there are certain facts a narrative must accurately pick out about the relationship between a present object and an established art world context (1994, 24-25). He summarises these facts as follows:

if through historical narration the disputed work can be shown to be the result of reasonable or appropriate choices and actions which are motivated by intelligible assessments that support a resolution to change the relevant artwork context for the sake of some recognisable aim of art, all things being equal, the disputed work is an artwork (1994, 25). (Davis, 2003, p. 171)

Davies goes on to say...

Contra Carroll, I deny that the mere existence of a relation such as exemplification, amplification, or repudiation between an object and past artworks is constitutive of its artistic status, for this is overinclusive.

The Stuckists are a British group of artists formed to protest against the increasing banality, literal-mindedness, and aesthetic impoverishment of much modern British art. Recently they picketed the Turner Prize (an annual competition for British artists under age forty, whose competitors are predominantly conceptual artists). They carried placards saying, "Where are the paintings?" and "resign Serota." The

Stuckists have a disapproving attitude toward an established art world context, are aware of the traditions of the context against which they are reacting, and conceive of these placards as a response to that context. The placards' use is an intelligible response to that context and is an appropriate means to achieving the Stuckists' ends of protesting about conceptual art. But they are not artworks.

If existing in a relation of repudiation to past artworks is a sufficient condition of an artwork, then it is hard to rule out the Stuckist placards as art. They cannot be excluded on the grounds that their makers did not conceive of them as art, for apart from their circularity, this cannot be a necessary condition of artworks given the existence of folkart. (Davies, 2003, p. 170-172)

Thomson would agree that the placards are not artworks, but would understand the irony. Childish and Thomson referred explicitly to this issue in 2000, in their series of statements under the heading 'Anti-anti-art', reproduced in the book *An Antidote to the Ghastly Turner Prize* catalogue in 2010. There are 13 points that clearly state the Stuckist stance, including point 2: 'Conceptual art (and its parochial manifestation as Brit Art) is based on and justified by the art of Marcel Duchamp.' (Childish, Thomson, 2010, p. 212) reminding us in point 3 that 'The art of Marcel Duchamp is not art. It is anti art by intent and effect' (Childish, Thomson, 2010, p. 212). Point 7 states: 'Today's art is not art. Its working methodology is to think of something which is not art and to call it art. This is exactly Duchamp's ideology' (Childish, Thomson, 2010, p. 212).

Both sides of the argument use Duchamp to validate their position.

Consequently there is an entrenched position from both sides, an argument

no one can win. The Stuckists have taken a stance. Kuspit (2004) argues in his book *The End of Art*, that art is over, due to the loss of the aesthetic experience, citing the work Marcel Duchamp and Barnett Newman as key elements in its decline. He states that...

Aesthetic experience allows one to recover the sense of individuality and authenticity lost to “obligatory behaviour” – no doubt necessary for social survival – because it allows for one to live in society with a measure of what can only be described as sublime if unrealistic happiness while, paradoxically, spearheading “the critical testing of (social) reality.” This is no doubt a heroic idea of the human potential of aesthetic experience, but the heroism is entirely private, for it involves insight into the needs of what Winnicott calls the incommunicado core of the self.

(Kuspit, 2004, p. 13)

Kuspit also references Barzun: ‘In a brilliant account of “The Rise of Art as Religion”, Jacques Barzun wrote that in the nineteenth century art became “the gateway to the realm of spirit for all those over whom the old religions have lost their hold.” The question today is why the religion of art has lost its hold – why art is no longer the gateway to the realm of spirit...’ (Kuspit, 2004, p. 161) I would suggest that for Stuckists, at least according to the remodernist manifesto (see appendix 1.2), looking for the gateway to the realm of the spirit is explicit in their thinking, and therefore addresses Kuspits concerns:

4. Remodernism^{xii} embodies spiritual depth and meaning and brings to an end an age of scientific materialism, nihilism and spiritual bankruptcy.

7. Spirituality is the journey of the soul on earth. Its first principle is a declaration of intent to face the truth. Truth is what it is, regardless of what we want it to be. Being a spiritual artist means addressing unflinchingly our projections, good and bad, the attractive and the grotesque, our strengths as well as our delusions, in order to know ourselves and thereby our true relationship with others and our connection to the divine.

8. Spiritual art is not about fairyland. It is about taking hold of the rough texture of life. It is about addressing the shadow and making friends with wild dogs. Spirituality is the awareness that everything in life is for a higher purpose.

9. Spiritual art is not religion. Spirituality is humanity's quest to understand itself and finds its symbology through the clarity and integrity of its artists.

13. A true art is the visible manifestation, evidence and facilitator of the soul's journey. Spiritual art does not mean the painting of Madonnas or Buddhas. Spiritual art is the painting of things that touch the soul of the artist. Spiritual art does not often look very spiritual, it looks like everything else because spirituality includes everything.

14. Why do we need a new spirituality in art? Because connecting in a meaningful way is what makes people happy. Being understood and understanding each other makes life enjoyable and worth living.

^{xii} Remodernism is a term coined by Childish and Thomson, and resulted in the Remodernist Manifesto, published on 1.3.2000. This manifesto can be found in appendix ii.

(The Remodernist Manifesto, written by Billy Childish and Charles Thomson
1.3.2000)

4.5 Why does a Spring Reverb bring us closer to God?

Guys like (Johnny) Cash and Jerry (Lee) Lewis and Link Wray and Iggy Pop even are very special to me. Their art comes from rich experience, you can't fake that authenticity. It can't be manipulated. They just go where instinct tells them, and more often than not it works. I admire that. There's not enough of that around. (Smith, 2008, p. 182)

An area of enquiry that began to force its way into my research was the notion of authenticity. It appears, after all, in point 1 of the Stuckist manifesto, which states 'Stuckism is the quest for authenticity. By removing the mask of cleverness and admitting where we are, the Stuckist allows him/herself uncensored expression.' As the manifesto is a collaboration between Childish and Thomson, inevitably some areas relate more to one individual than another. Through the course of my conversations, I have been able to ascertain the degree of influence that both parties had on the various points. A co-written manifesto is always going to have a degree of compromise. As we shall see, in retrospect Thomson is not entirely comfortable with allowing the word 'authenticity' to be used, as it was not precise enough for his intent. For Childish, it seems to be a key element of his thinking.

I asked Childish about authenticity:

It's like your digital reverb, you have got 250 digital reverbs, but if you have one spring reverb you don't need any other one. A synthesisation of something doesn't replace the real thing, and the real thing is God and nature and artists being dependent on craft to enable themselves to have vision rather than just look. So what you do is that you learn to draw, which is constraining and difficult but it means that when you look at a van Gogh painting you sometimes break through looking and achieve seeing, because drawing enables you to see colour and line and light in the world in a profoundly different way, and it means that you allow vision and ideas to come through, it doesn't mean you make yourself a slave like Michelangelo. It means you don't need to. You are teaching yourself to swim, then you don't have to bother with swimming, you can float if you want or do something else. These chaps are walking about all the time pretending to be swimming.

PH I might have taken this too literally but why do you think a spring reverb is closer to God or involves God more than a digital reverb?

BC The reason being is that it has a mechanical... it has a material aspect and things that have a material aspect are very useful for inducing spiritual things. Things that are spiritual and ungrounded like digital have got no material aspect and are up in the ether, they lack connection. You can use digital reverb, and if you get digital reverb and you roll the top off on the EQ and you roll the bass off on the EQ and

you are doing a pretty good job and that is because you have discipline and understand that you should be using one thing, because reverb was invented to be put across music, and usually the reverb would suit the whole track and would often be put in when the whole thing is mastered. Now you have little snippets of reverb, different styles of the 250 on different instruments and it's multi layered, and the idea is that you construct a harmony or whole out of that, and what happens is that the limitlessness of choice has just given you nothing. If you limit choice it means, "if the fish is good then it doesn't need salt".

PH Yeah, right

BC Cooking analogies are the best. The thing is, the thing is basically ok, I mean why do we have synthesised reverb? Well because we haven't got a real one, because it is too expensive. The reason we have a spring reverb is because we can't afford to have a real reverb because we can't afford to have a room set up with a big reverb in, and that is the best, real reverb is the best but then spring comes next, so what happens next is that you only have the approximation if you haven't got the real thing, and that's ok and we can make do with that, but lets not pretend that the approximation is the real thing. The reason that we have digital is that people wanted to re-sell a lot of hardware again. The valve hasn't been surpassed, it is too expensive that's all.

PH It is unreliable, often.

BC We are back to expense again, but it is still the best, and I mean when I was saying that 30 years ago, there was a bit of contention about that but now, of course, there isn't, now people are building those things and it is recognised as being the best. The best studios show off about it.

PH The authenticity thing in music is kind of like, I mean, the Moog for instance was not considered authentic in the 70's and there was a lot of antagonism towards it, but, of course, now The Moog analogue synthesizer is considered authentic because it is pre-digital, so perhaps what is authentic changes really.

BC Yeah, but I don't think it is what's authentic, lets say conceptions of what is. It is conception that changes and also rareness and distance change everything. I mean if they knocked down all the Tesco buildings, the one that was left would be worth preserving because it is interesting. But it isn't worth knocking down really good buildings just in case that happens. But I suppose things obviously change with the relaxing of time and distance and that's an absolute truth of nature, I mean that's a truth of vision. I mean like a skunk in nature is not a nice thing to have in your face but at 2 miles it smells pleasant, it is a natural thing.

(Childish in conversation with the author 17.4.08, just off Farringdon Road, London)



Figure 16: equipment used by Billy Childish

It is easy sometimes to develop a personal connection with something and then see it as authentic, much as I insist in using Vox AC30 amplifiers because The Beatles and other Sixties bands used them – this type of thinking is common in rock music. Thomson finds this notion of authenticity (through using old equipment) ludicrous. Wolf Howard, one of the original London Stuckists, strikes a nice balance between these two contrasting views, as although dismissing digital technology for his photographic work, preferring to use a pinhole camera, this camera has been designed and built to his own specifications. The camera is therefore authentic to him, and he is merely using a method (the pinhole) that he both feels comfortable with, and that will give him the ‘feel’ that he wants in his work. This is no different to a painter choosing specific paints say, oils or acrylic, to suit their style or vision.



Fig 17: Wolf Howard's pinhole camera, built to his own specifications

During early discussions about authenticity with Thomson he defined the word authenticity as 'honesty'. Thomson also stated that authenticity is 'a Billy word', although in later conversations he went on to explain at length his own thoughts surrounding this difficult area. As these later discussions with Thomson on the nature of authenticity within Stuckism developed, he began to see it as an area that could cause problems in the future. He was also possibly aware that Childish could take ownership of the word. In one of the conversations, he expanded on this idea of honesty. I have left this section of the conversation unedited:

CT Well the obvious thing that struck me when I started thinking about this, because I don't think about this, I don't usually think about the manifesto or read the manifesto. First thing that struck me was the definition of authenticity is that it is the antonym of fake, so it is a very

simple concept, you know, you are not fake, you are authentic, which means genuine. The thing is, I think that what is going to happen if anybody takes Stuckism seriously, as scholars and academics start to look at it, they will make a mountain out of this word authenticity which I don't think should be made out of it. I think they are going to turn it into something which it never was and they are going to find all sorts of meanings and applications and it will be their invention, and I think that is the flaw in the original writing of the manifesto that has laid itself in that case open to that possibility.

PH That is why we need to pin it down.

CT Well what I am saying is I am actually trying to undermine it and saying, no, that people will want to read too much into it, you have missed the point, it wasn't actually conceived in that way, it wasn't intended in that way, it was actually a much more simple thing and I did say it was a Billy word because he wanted it in there. So if you are going to look at authenticity in the Stuckist manifesto, because it didn't mean much to me at all, but on the other hand, I couldn't dismiss it or challenge it or say it shouldn't be there, because you can hardly say it is wrong to say you want to be authentic, even though it doesn't mean a lot, or people are going to read more into it than you mean yourself. There is no reason not, you know if Billy wants that and it is important to him then it seems a reasonable thing to say.

PH Well, yeah

CT But I think the way he intended it was probably actually very simple and, I think, it can probably be illuminated in his intention of it by comparing his work with Bill Lewis. I mean I don't know exactly what Billy had in mind by authentic, I think it was partly with Brit Art in mind, that that was somehow fake because it was, well I will come on to that in a second, partly Brit Art in mind but also I think it was partly with Bill Lewis in mind, because he can't stand Bill Lewis's stuff, he thinks Bill Lewis is sham. Bill Lewis thinks he's a shaman, Billy thinks he is just sham with it, and that is very interesting. I mean I think that's one of the ways to, it's an important way to understand what the word authentic means in the context of the Stuckist manifesto and also the limitation of how it should be interpreted. I will come on to the Brit art thing in a minute, but let's just deal with Bill Lewis, because someone said to me, it wasn't Billy, but someone said to me, "well you got authentic and how about Bill Lewis he is not authentic he lives in Chatham and he acts like a Red Indian, he has Red Indian chants" and so on and I suppose the automatic comparison is with Billy Childish who lives in Chatham and writes about the Chatham experience. So on a very superficial level you can say Bill Lewis is not authentic because his writing is very strongly about, with the kind of approach of attitude or borrowings from another culture. Billy Childish is authentic because everything he does is rooted in Chatham, and if you were simply talking about one level of meaning, then that would apply: if you were talking about the material and social level. If you start talking about deeper, psychological and spiritual levels and, after all, the Stuckist manifesto does state those,

then I don't think you could see it in such a simplistic way, and you might actually end up with the conclusion that it was Bill Lewis who was the authentic one and Billy Childish who wasn't, even though the material of Billy's is authentic and you could say that the material of Bills at first reading isn't authentic. If you are looking at deeper issues on what you might call the soul or spiritual issues, then the situation could be reversed, I mean you could say on the basis of the initial appraisal I just made, you could say the initial appraisal of the Renaissance was that it wasn't authentic because it took from ancient culture, Greek culture, and you could say the authentic culture of the time was the inheritance of Medievalism and suddenly they imported something from somewhere else, but by importing in that way they were able to actually be more authentic to their world view, their philosophical view because it evolved out of Medieval England, so it would have been inauthentic to have carried on using a mode that they were rejecting because they were evolving into something else, and actually the Greek model became one which was the vehicle they could use to state how they genuinely thought the world had understood it, so authentic and genuine I think come very close to each other.

So coming back to Bill, yes he lives in Chatham, fine, but you might live in a place, you might have experiences there on one level but on another level you have different experiences which can't be derived, in his case, from the Chatham experience because it is a very limited

one, the general outlook is very limited and what he found in spirit was something else that transcended the limitations of his material environment, and surely that happens recurrently throughout history. It's the external environment that is not authentic to human needs. So in order to be authentic you can't just derive from environment, so I would say Bill was authentic because what he found in Indian culture was, let's say, a contact with the spirit, a great spirit. He found a passion that you don't get from going down to the shopping centre in Chatham. He found a vision, and we need that vision, we need that brought into our culture and sometimes you have to use a metaphor, you may have to use another culture's way of doing that and I think he has made that his own and when he did that poetry performance, I can't remember whether it was one of his Indian chants but it was that kind of thing, it was a chant he was doing that was derived from that sort of Indian chant, ghost dancers. You can't doubt that there is something genuine and real going on there. You don't look at it and think this is completely pretentious, you think this is a man of passion; he has found a vehicle to bring something into our culture which could be integrated with our culture, and yet part of its mode came from another culture. And the other thing is now, of course, we are a global culture anyway, and I think that is something we have to take on board. I mean, Impressionism was heavily influenced and took on modes of Japanese wood blocks, because what they were born into and brought up with, the academic tradition, was the thing that was false to their experience of the world. It was a kind of fossil, it wasn't living and they

found it in Japanese wood blocks, there was something alive that they could fuse with, incorporate elements of, to make their work become authentic to their experiences, because the Japanese, when they were doing those works, you know, did have an authenticity about them, a vision about depicting things, and the Impressionists recognised that reality, and it applied to them. So, if you see something that is completely foreign and distant from you that actually makes you come alive and see your reality in a more genuine way, then that would seem to be the definition of, you know, a definition of authenticity as far as borrowing from elsewhere goes as opposed to just borrowing because it is a completely fashionable thing, and that is all it is. But, even so, it can still be distilled over time into something which is not just fashion. But coming to Billy's stuff, yes it is all about Chatham but I certainly feel that, especially with the early work, there is a large element of fake and posture, and although he is using his immediate environment, his experience, what he is actually doing with it is turning it into a stage show. There is an exaggeration, there is a kind of mask that he has put on and, let's say with his book, "My Fault", I felt that when I was reading it, it was like getting into a kind of Beano cartoon, biff, bang, wallop, and he likes this drama.

PH Yeah

CT This melodrama.

PH Yeah

CT This melodrama... it's actually exaggeration in order for effect, as opposed to how you might see Bill as not exaggerating. Bill comes across dramatically but that seems to take us closer to who we really are. We feel more strongly, whereas I think that the Beano comic exaggeration takes us away from what we really are into a world where things happen differently to real experience. So to that extent, you might want to say that Billy Childish is, the way he used his immediate experience, where he used it, not the experience itself, but the way he used it and the way he depicted it, was not authentic which, I don't know, he might be horrified by or he might actually agree with... because he says, you know, he says "I like making a fuss, I like making an impact, I like the sort of fun of it, I like playing games, I like sending things up" essentially, you know, treating it as a joke, so he might actually concur with some of what I am saying, though I don't think he would about Bill. But I think that is what Billy means by authentic: it's like "I am drawing from here and now, I am drawing from Chatham", whereas Bill Lewis is pretending he is a Red Indian. But I don't think Bill Lewis is pretending he is a Red Indian, I think he is recognising some kindred spirit, I think, whereas Billy is pretending he is some kind of Jack the Lad. So that is one contrast with authenticity, and I said the other one obviously would be with Brit art, with Tracey Emin, White Cube and Hirst and so on, that Brit art isn't authentic, it's done for effect. You're thinking "how do I make an impact, how do I succeed in

the media, how do I sell my work, what do I need to do?”, that’s the starting point of making it, and I think he would definitely see this. But Tracey, the fact that she said “if I carry on doing painting, I wouldn’t have been successful”, from that he concludes that she has modified her practice, to use that awful term, (because we’re not doctors, or we are not rehearsing), so she has modified her practice, not from genuine artistic needs, but from commercial needs purely, and that is certainly not authentic and, in fact, the whole of Brit art has developed a practice which is based on the same principles or rather lack of: “ how do we make a big noise”, not “how do we do something which is meaningful, worthwhile, deeper, how do we bring something into our lives, into the world which is in itself, regardless of any other considerations, a commercial success?”, and at that point you come to the statement which Billy and I have made and that other people have made connected with the Stuckists, that you wouldn’t sit in a room for 20 years pickling sheep because it is meaningless, you would sit in a room for 20 years painting a picture because it is meaningful. So my conclusion is actually that really it does go back to what I said in the very first instance, that authentic is just being honest, but honest at all levels.

PH I suppose that Brit Artists can argue that they are being authentic because they are holding up the mirror to the society that they are living in.

CT Now hang on.

PH They would say that it's, you know, reflecting the superficial...

CT They're not holding up a mirror, they become a mirror, they are not holding one up and that is a big difference. If you hold up a mirror, then you are detached from it. Essentially Stuckism holds up a mirror because it's a mirror like the queen looked in and saw herself as being horribly ugly, but it wasn't the mirror that was ugly, the mirror was pristine and perfect, so Stuckism is a mirror in that sense, because you put forward the genuine and then you compare that with the pap, with the force, you compare the Stuckists' work with an advert and it sort of acts as a mirror in that way by default. Whereas Brit art has become the mirror, they have identified with the mirror, they have identified with what's in the mirror, that is them, it is what they are making... they are holding a mirror but they are actually contributing more of the same stuff.

So it is not a mirror, a mirror should not, it's like the image has become fixed in the mirror, so the mirror has become the same thing as the reflection, you know, the person that is reflected in it. Whereas a mirror should actually be detached, and besides which we have always said "anyone can hold up a mirror to something", I mean it is the easiest thing in the world. It is much harder to move things on, create an alternative and go beyond what you can see is wrong.

PH Because they are merely, you know, contributing to the problem.

CT Yes, it is more of the same, there is crap going on and they make crap, then there is twice as much crap.

PH Yes

(Thomson in conversation with the author 10.7.09, Finchley, London)



Fig 18: Bill Lewis performing

During my conversation with Childish, he also discussed his attitude towards Bill Lewis:

BC Bill has never been able to get off stage and liked to be centre stage and when he got on he never wanted to get off, and thinks he is very interesting, but everyone else is cringing. So me and Sexton spent

most of time taking the piss out of all members of the group and writing parodies of their poems and generally thinking “they are a bunch of wankers” and Charles and Denman were trying to get us expelled and Bill was attracted by me and Sexton, and wasn’t sure, and found Sexton very, very amusing, so it was about from day one.

PH Because Wolf was saying how you still heckle Bill really even now.

BC I don’t heckle, I am just trying not to laugh and that is what I am used to, we used to shudder. Bill is original and is highly delusional and is not satisfied with where he is or how he is and you have to be aware that he is unstable.

PH Bill is very sincere

BC A lot of mad men are. I mean what he does is that it is impossible to meet the real Bill Lewis. I mean Bill undervalues himself to a degree and overvalues himself. He is a manicdepressive and it is very hard to meet Bill Lewis because he either telling you what he does is absolute rubbish or he’s telling you he’s an absolute genius and he’s neither.

PH I did an interview with him for the DVD and I remember him saying I am someone who doesn’t like myself very much, you know.

BC He is quite intensely jealous, he is very private and he talks about spirituality and he actually derides- he thinks he's the only intellectual in the village and he really does, and he doesn't allow himself to be ok and he talks about these very high minded things but doesn't apply anything, so it is very unexperiential, his wisdom is worthless because he doesn't apply it, it is not experienced, it is an idea so it remains in the realm of idea but it is very difficult to be frank with Bill because he is either up there or down there. He is highly dramatic and says he will never write again and actually Sexton is quite similar, Sexton is never going to write again or do this, they are into drama all the time, you know they are damaged which we all are, but to quite a significant degree, so they don't actually like honest discourse too much- its difficult. The whole thing is so fucking dysfunctional, the whole group. (Childish in conversation with the author 17.4.08, just off Farringdon Road, London)

This 'drama' of which Thomson and Childish talk about, always seems to be, according to them, perpetrated by somebody else within the group. What is evident, not just during the time of the Stuckists, but right back to the Medway Poets, is this battle as to who can be, or who is, the most (if I am permitted to use the word this loosely) *authentic* person. This includes not just Thomson and Childish, but clearly Bill Lewis as a kind of fulcrum, with figures such as Sexton Ming also involved. Involved too though, is Tracey Emin, and it may be this battle that has led to Emin being such a punchbag, as clearly at the time of the Medway Poets she would have been considered one of the least

‘authentic’ personalities, but one who has become the most successful. Perhaps there is even an element of bullying and attempts at humiliation, something I recognise from the early days of Punk when I was playing with a group of talented, but sometimes cruel individuals in Alsager, Cheshire.

Childish discussed authenticity with Kristin Walter, a student at the Technische Universität Dortmund in Germany, who was attending a seminar on *Days with a Hard Like a Dog: Medway Poets in Literature, Painting and Music*. The correspondence (by email) was as follows:

KW “authenticity”: Could you perhaps elaborate on your idea of “authenticity”?

BC authenticity is a genuine emotional response with the world, unguarded and unmediated by false fears and aspirations (ideally)

KW How does the notion of authenticity effect your own work?

BC It makes the work feel real as it is made. It is being in the moment of creation. “self-discovery”:

KW What inner actions and emotions are revealed when you paint?

BC Nerosiss, needs, rejection, desires, aspirations, love, both mundane and spiritual

Childish’s answers here differ in definition from my conversation with him and consequently highlight the difficulties inherent within the subject: I am not suggesting that I would consider either of the answers inauthentic in any way,

just that authenticity is a slippery concept. Note the use of the word 'feel' though, as we will return to it as a way of defining authenticity within practice.

Within art the word authenticity can be used to cover different areas of inquiry. Denis Dutton breaks this down into two areas, that of nominal authenticity and expressive authenticity. Nominal authenticity, although still complex, relates essentially to forgery and plagiarism, or as Dutton remarks 'simply as the correct identification of the origins, authorship, or provenance of an object, ensuring, as the term implies, that an object of aesthetic experience is properly named.' (<http://denisdutton.com/authenticity.htm> accessed 16.8.10)

In other words, we are asking questions such as "is this a real (or authentic) Van Gogh, or is it a forgery? Or is it an honest copy?" Within music we may ask if an orchestra's interpretation of a piece of music is authentic to the original wishes of the composer and/or to the time in which it was written.

Expressive authenticity is where the problems occur. Dutton discusses how the concept of authenticity often connotes something else, for example with an object's character as a true expression of an individual's or a society's values and beliefs. This second sense of authenticity he calls expressive authenticity. This was recognised by modern European philosophers, as Jacob Golomb outlines in his book *In Search of Authenticity* (1985).

Thomson's use of the word 'honesty' immediately causes problems according to Golomb:

the terms 'sincerity' and 'honesty' are applicable to an individual whose inner convictions and commitments are congruent with that individual's behaviour. As such, they differ from 'authenticity', which cannot be said to apply to any such

correspondence, since correspondence presumes a static subject, while authenticity requires an incessant movement of becoming, self-transcendence and self-creation. It calls for no particular contents or consequences but, rather, focuses on the origins and the intensity of one's emotional-existential commitments, on what Kierkegaard calls 'subjective inwardness' and Satre 'engagement'. (Golomb, 1995, p. 8)

According to Golomb, Hegel, in the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* (1807), goes as far as to criticize the 'honest individual' arguing that honesty and sincerity 'exemplify submission to the prevailing morality' and neutralize our urge to escape the conditions that circumscribe us and limit our sense of freedom.' (Golomb, 1995, p. 9) This relating of honesty to the prevailing social, ethical, legal and other dimensions of our cultural lives is contentious and was seen differently by existentialists such as Kierkegaard and Sartre who responded to Hegel's ideas. The difference, Golomb argues, is that freedom came to be seen in the century following the publication of the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* as the negation, rather than affirmation, of a current ethic. The individual must overcome the demands of their personal history by 'not defining oneself according to present or future historical predicaments'. (Golomb, 1995, p. 9) However, within this unfolding debate about 'the honest individual' Golomb observes that room was made for pathos of authenticity as we experience it in the modern world.

Paradoxically, although the idea of 'honesty' (or merely the word honesty as a description of a concept) is rejected, this standpoint relates both to Punk and to Stuckist philosophy. Here we see the problem with words, which can perhaps sometimes be mistaken for ideas, a mistake that is often due to

philosophy using a different language in which to explore ideas. Is it perhaps then disingenuous to systematically pull apart a simple statement of intent for the sake of academic rigour? Probably not, but it may be useful to consider where the practitioner fits in: for some artists, issues of honesty, sincerity and authenticity are at the forefront of their thinking- they are problems that continually need to be dealt with as their practice develops. It is during the production of work itself that practitioners such as Punks and Stuckists often debate, engage with, and discuss these concepts with *themselves*, not usually within the pages of philosophical books. It important then, to consider how practitioners relating to this study discuss these notions, or how these notions can be extrapolated from their statements.



Fig 19: TV Smith on stage on the evening of the conversation

TV Smith, for example, talks about his song writing in the early days of the Adverts:

I had never written a song by starting “I’m going to write this style or that style”. For a start most of them are lyric driven so the idea of it being in a certain style is absurd and I just don’t like the idea of writing to a certain style, it just doesn’t attract me at all. I write to express myself. (Smith in conversation with the author 29.3.08, London)

Pauline Murray discusses similar issues:

We never really had any idea we just did, you know. Whatever came out was what came out and that’s always what I have been like, it was never geared towards,” let’s write Apache, a hit single”, we were unable to sort of function in that sort of way. It was all about your own sort of emotions in a way. It was quite an emotional... it came from inside of you rather than out of you. Obviously you have taken influences from everywhere, you know, and at that age you are a sponge and you take influences from everywhere, but it’s your influences, and it is important that you bring them out of yourself in your own way, you know, and that is really what, I think, we were like. (Murray in conversation with the author 7.2.09, Newcastle upon Tyne)

Later on a discussion developed on the theme of honesty:

PM ...to be honest, we always thought we were an honest band, so how do you explain what an honest band is?

PH Well you see that's the other...

PM True to ourselves, is how I would explain it. We never did things that we didn't feel were true to our beliefs or ourselves.

PH Because the other word that I have been trying to get my head around, is this word authentic because authenticity appears in the Stuckist manifesto, it is the first aspect of it and it talks about the quest for authenticity, you know, when I asked Charles Thompson, what is authenticity, he actually said honesty, it is about honesty and you have just used that same word, and I think these are words that are really quite difficult for people to say, they are difficult ideas for people to talk about. For some people because it is kind of considered a bit sad, a bit, you know what I mean...

PM A bit limited to be honest.

PH Well not limited but like a bit, but like you are a bit of a fool, that you are a bit foolish to believe in that, you know.

PM Yeah I know what you mean, you know people can feel it is foolish to be honest, because, you know, these days, you know, it is not always a good thing to be honest because you wear your heart on your sleeve.

PH Because it kind of puts you in a vulnerable position.

PM Very vulnerable position

PH You know if you openly talk about things like that, but I mean would you say that what you have just said about the band, about Penetration, that a lot of that comes from yourself, it is nothing to do with Punk, but I think Punk kind of gave you the opportunity to demonstrate that about yourself as a human being, as a personality, I mean do you think that you have always kept that pureness with everything you have done?

PM Yeah, definitely

PH And do you think it has served you well creatively over the years, do you think?

PM Well it depends how you look at it, you know, I mean, I think that if you think that you can destroy your own career through your own honesty then it depends how you look at it. Someone on the outside might say, what a fool to do that.

(Murray in conversation with the author 7.2.09, Newcastle upon Tyne)

Savage says of Murray that she is 'a true believer, retaining the passion and the idealism of that period'. (Savage, 2009, p. 631) Thomson would identify with Murray's statements, and Murray's responses, I would suggest, have an air of authenticity about them. Wolf Howard, former Stuckist and drummer

with Childish's band, discusses the problems of playing an 'authentic' Ska beat:

Well we was doing some recording the other day and someone said... you know, we were doing a Ska type of song, we were doing Run Rabbit Run as a Ska version and someone was there and they said to me "this is the sort of beat they did in the Ska thing" and I said well I don't know if I can do it, and they said "well you know, if you are doing Ska", and I said "but the thing is I am not in Kingston, I am a bloke who lives in Chatham trying to do Ska and that's how I want it to sound like. (Howard in conversation with the author, 14.4.08, Sun and Doves pub, London)

It can be argued that these practitioners do not need to be aware of philosophical arguments, as they instinctively understand and can react to the issues involved when creating. They use terms like 'feel' to assess the quality of work. This is Punk and Stuckist philosophy being discussed by the people that practice it. The opinions and ideas outlined above could be considered to be universal within the two disciplines, but my experience within both suggests otherwise. For some artists and musicians for example, the notion of honesty, or authenticity within what they do is a non-issue, as commercial success is an overriding factor. Thomson and Childish would bracket many of the conceptually based artists within that group.

4.6 Inauthenticity and the INS



Fig 20: The International Necronautical Society at Tate Britain, January 2009

This section discusses an alternative approach to manifesto writing within the fine art environment that can be compared to Stuckism. The International Necronautical Society (henceforth known as the INS) was formed in 1999 by Tom McCarthy (the same year as Stuckism), and according to the press briefing ‘inhabits and appropriates a variety of art forms and cultural moments from the defunct avant-gardes of the last century to the political, corporate and conspiratorial organisations they mimicked. The INS’s manifestos, proclamations, reports, broadcasts, hearings, inspectorates, departments, committees and sub-committees are the vehicles for interventions in the space of art, fiction, philosophy and media.’

Lewin and Williams in *The Ideology and Practice of Authenticity in Punk Subculture* (2009) discuss how the interviewees for their fieldwork ‘insisted

that they could distinguish between people who were being themselves and those who were performing roles for instrumental purposes'. (Lewin and Williams, 2009, p. 73) It could be argued that Stuckism also responds to this level of cultural inauthenticity when ridiculing conceptual artists in the press, an activity seen as crude and adolescent in the art world but perfectly acceptable within the orbit of the Punk subculture. In January 2009 I attended a presentation by the International Necronautical Society (INS) at Tate Britain, part of Tate's Triennial. The INS put forward the idea of 'inauthenticity as one of the central tenets of their thinking'. (INS Press briefing: Declaration on Inauthenticity Tate Britain, 17 January 2009 1/17) Point 30 of their declaration, claims that...

Art is governed by what Mark E. Smith of the mighty Fall calls the three R's: repetition, repetition and repetition. As a consequence, we think artists should continue to do what they have always done: steal. Art is a repetitive mechanism that functions through theft, forgery, copying and embedding.

(16/17 INS Press briefing: Declaration on Inauthenticity Tate Britain, 17 January 2009)

The lyrics to The Fall song *Repetition* are as follows:

We dig repetition
We dig repetition
We've repetition in the music
And we're never going to lose it.

All you daughters and sons
who are sick of fancy music

We dig repetition
Repetition on the drums
and we're never going to lose it.

This is the three R's
The three R's:
Repetition, Repetition, Repetition
Oh mental hospitals
Oh mental hospitals
They put electrodes in your brain
And you're never the same
You don't dig repetition
You don't love repetition

(<http://www.sing365.com/music/lyric.nsf/REPETITION-lyrics-The-Fall/B782ECDD57D132FF48256AA800209FCD> accessed 6.8.11)

It is about the sound, an acknowledgment of the repetitive beat, and it also references his experience of mental hospitals, as Smith himself states:

We lived at the back of the mental hospital. Una [a fellow band member] worked there. Psychiatric nurses lived in every two or three houses. Biggest mental hospital in Europe; serious mental patients. I'd invite in patients for a cup of tea. Sit them down, play them some rock and roll, a bit of telly. Sometimes I think I did more good than all the nurses put together. They'd go out all cheerful It was bad in those days, but I think it's just as bad now, worse. That's what the song 'Repetition' is about. They used to give them Largactyl and Mandrax for depression, heavy downers; but when you went out into the sun all your face would flare up into blisters. I took them for kicks just to see what they were like. (Smith, 2009, p. 35)

Although it could be argued that they ‘stole’ ideas of repetitiveness from bands such as the Velvet Underground^{xiii}, Smith would see it differently:

I’m not a big music buff, but every song I hear reminds me of some other fucker, and give or take a few tracks here and there, you can’t say that about The Fall.

Something that is original does stand out to me, always has.

(Smith, 2009, p.115)

Smith’s referencing by the INS does not ring true to me. This brings me to question the honesty of the whole (quite long, 39 points) statement. Although they dismiss the term postmodernism: ‘As an organisation, we have always resisted the catch all term ‘postmodernism’ – and particularly when it is used to designate a cultural or historical period that follows ‘modernism’.’ (9/17) it could be argued that theirs is a postmodern stance: attempted humour, irony, a mix of classical and popular culture, name dropping, and a general kitchen sink approach to the writing of statements.

This activity, as seen in the INS’s use of a Punk musician with credibility, I like to call lazy appropriation, a term occasionally used when discussing music.

Although clearly this cultural borrowing enables the borrower to recontextualise the original meaning, it has to work. It has to have meaning - it should not merely be used in a superficial way, or to gain ‘brownie points’.

This relates to my practice, as appropriation is explicitly evident within my

^{xiii} The Velvet Underground were a New York band, involved with Pop artist Andy Warhol. They were famous for their repetitive songs, including the well known ‘Heroin’.

work; it is also within this research, and it could be argued that using Punk to validate Stuckism is as cynical as the accusation directed at the INS. Integrity and honesty are therefore vital: I contend that it is fine to be wrong as long as one is wrong in the right way: 'If it is the conceptualist's wish to always be clever, then it is the Stuckist's duty to always be wrong.' (The Stuckist Manifesto, see appendix i)

The end result of this lazy appropriation becomes a possibly amusing, and perhaps even clever statement, but lacking in soul, in honesty, in authenticity. Perhaps the INS would argue that that is the whole point. Authenticity though, is not the same as being original: it is still possible to 'steal' and to be authentic. The INS, I would contend, recognised some of the same issues as Stuckism, but comes to the opposite conclusion. They are part of the problem, as opposed to the solution: similar in fact to what Thomson says about some of the yBas.

At the time of writing (9.8.11), the front page of *The Daily Star* has 'Anarchy in the UK' (*The Sex Pistols*, 1976) as a headline. Yesterdays *Daily Mirror* had 'London's Burning' (*The Clash*, 1977) as a headline. Both refer to the riots in London. This type of appropriation by the tabloids is more fun, and perhaps even has more meaning, than that of the INS. This discussion of the INS can be seen as acknowledging a contrasting approach (to that of Stuckism), to the dilemma postmodernism has given us within the fine art environment. I would argue that, although both the INS (supported by the Tate) and Stuckism (not supported by the Tate) appropriate punk within their public information,

Stuckism uses it more successfully and understands better the punk attitude, a concept both groups are using in an attempt to validate their points of view.

4.7 The problem of authenticity and technique



Fig 21: Philip Absolon *Executive Job Club*, 2006

A major similarity between Punk and Stuckism is linked to the DIY approach that caused the critical perception that Punks could not play their instruments – in other words the criterion of poor technique. Stuckism certainly doesn't discriminate against artists without a formal training. Although some Stuckists are suspicious of artists who do not display a high level of academic training (e.g. the Prague group), this attitude is not shared by Thomson or Childish. When we look at Punk, *The Adverts*, for example, were certainly considered as being limited technically, but this was not a barrier to them performing (they were in fact unfairly singled out for special attention as being the band that

couldn't play). This insistence on being creative and showing it publicly, despite lack of technical ability, again, I felt, related to Stuckism, as it was clear many paintings exhibited by the Stuckists demonstrate a distinct lack of technique in terms of academic standards expected within the fine art environment.^{xiv} My argument is that unlike the music press (particularly *The New Musical Express*) in 1976 and 1977, the fine art environment continually has to re-remember the fact that artists who are perceived as being technically limited can produce work of a high quality – it all depends on which assessment criteria you use in order to value it's worth. Terms have been developed by historians and critics when dealing with this problem, such as Art Brut, Outsider Art, and Folk Art, but it is my contention that the best Stuckist work does not fall into any of these categories. Many of the Stuckists have formal art education, and these art terms all suggest a lack of such. Interestingly, in popular music, the opposite has often been true; musicians who study music academically (or at performing arts colleges) are often considered of less worth than those who haven't had any musical education. (This was not the case for a brief period of time in the years immediately preceeding Punk, when progressive rock was popular, and musical dexterity was seen as something to be applauded). If we look at three of the most successful groups within popular music from Britain in the early 60s (for example, *The Beatles*, *The Rolling Stones*, and *The Who*) none of them had had any formal musical training. But they would not be considered as 'outsiders'. This raises the question of whether contemporary art can, or

^{xiv} Paradoxically, this only seems to apply to paintings, as critics do not seem to be concerned as to how well Damien Hirst's shark has been preserved technically, or how well Tracey Emin can sew.

should, be assessed in the same way as popular music, or whether the academic nature of the subject rejects these comparisons. I believe that it can be, as it is now generally accepted that the work of *The Beatles* is as important within British culture as the work of the Pop artists at the same time. The work of *The Who* with their album *The Who Sell Out*, as a creative piece of work, is indistinguishable, it could be argued, from the best British Pop art of Peter Blake and others, except that it communicates to a bigger audience, and not just a less educated one.

A significant reason as to why I single out *The Adverts* as having made what I contend to be the best punk album from this time (*Crossing the Red Sea with The Adverts*, 1978), is that unlike most of the early British Punk bands, it was hard to find elements of traditional rock and roll or rhythm and blues elements in the music. Almost certainly this was because they didn't know how to do it, and celebrated that fact. TV Smith sees this as a vital element as to why Punk is now treated with respect...

people are interested in Punk because they are interested in a time in music where people did what they wanted to do and were creative and weren't bound by conventional rules ... When I was writing the songs I didn't know what chord was supposed to follow another chord, and also I found that this is an innocence you never get back. (Smith in conversation with the author 29.3.08, London)

This lack of understanding of formal songwriting conventions (and consequently the inability to copy existing sounds and structures) enabled them to develop new ones, as Smith acknowledged...

I didn't know how to do that Rock and Roll stuff, obviously I had heard it but I wouldn't know how to play it. If I struggled I could do 12 bar blues on the guitar but that would be about it and I didn't want to write songs like that, so I never learnt it. I still don't know how to play conventional Rock and Roll. I mean I know some more conventional chord changes now and use them more often but I never wanted to do that. (Smith in conversation with the author, 29.3.08, London)

Smith also related to me the story of the title of the album:

PH Why was the album called *Crossing the Red Sea*, I mean it wasn't your title was it, was it a friend or a journalist?

TVS A journalist called Jane Suck [from *Sounds* magazine]. The thing is because we already had this reputation that we were so inept that we could barely make a single, she once said to us to make an album was like crossing the Red Sea, because the actual chance of successfully making an album seemed in the public opinion so ridiculous it reached biblical proportions. I mean it really was just a joke. (Smith in conversation with the author, 29.3.08, London)

Davy Henderson explained to me that the guitar sound of his band the Fire Engines developed basically because 'we barred bar chords because we couldn't play them'. I also asked him about how he feels about his guitar playing now:

DH I still can't play the fucking thing

PH You clearly can, it depends how you assess it though...

DH I think lacking in technique has never stopped me finding something that I totally fucking love, you know something that I have made up, and I think that if you find something, and someone is going to dig it and you know: you are going to get a response, at least with the people you play with in the band.

(Henderson in conversation with the author 10.3.11, Star and Shadow, Newcastle upon Tyne)

Whereas *The Sex Pistols*, *The Clash* and others had already incorporated traditional ideas into their playing, *The Adverts*, and to a certain extent, Henderson had a blank canvas- they did not feel weighed down by history. Stuckist artists, some through lack of technique, but others through choice, have also freed themselves from this weight, the weight of art history that affects all of us, particularly in painting. This is also an example of the difficulties in pinning down Stuckist thinking, as some Stuckist artists draw on art history and are very familiar with it, just as musicians such as Smith and

Henderson, although possibly lacking in perceived technique, had a significant knowledge of popular music history. This needs to be recognised as it is a common accusation to level at Stuckists: that they are not educated in either art history or practice.

Within both Punk and Stuckism I believe that technique is correctly considered of secondary importance in relation to ideas. Smith made this point explicitly in my conversation with him...

brilliant guitar players who don't have the ideas are nothing compared to someone who has the ideas, and if you have a choice, and in my case my feeling about Punk Rock was that if you had to have the choice between ideas and technique, then I would go for ideas. (Smith in conversation with the author, 29.3.08, London)

The first Adverts album, *Crossing The Red Sea With The Adverts* was reviewed in the New Musical Express by Charles Shaar Murray on 25th February 1978 and Murray, although generally supportive of the punk movement, nevertheless had difficulty with this particular record, stating that despite having played live for well over a year they were still 'total musical featherweights', calling their approach 'rather ramshackle'. He also believed that they were in the unusual position of having a set of material that they were not competent to do justice to technically. Murray, I feel, missed point. They sounded as they did, because that was the way they wanted to sound. The clearest example of Murray misunderstanding and using the wrong

assessment criteria, is when he states that 'If The Adverts could play these songs in any manner other than the most totally obvious bang-their-way-through-the-chords manner ...they'd be one of the most exciting bands around. Can you imagine these songs played with the kind of raunch that Steve Jones and Paul Cook [Sex Pistols guitarist and drummer] could bring to them?'. (Murray, 1978)

I asked Smith about this observation...

TVS No he was totally wrong, I mean, there were so many journalists who totally misunderstood it and I think that 30 years have proved that what people love about The Adverts now would have been totally destroyed if we had been a conventional rock band and could lay down a groove. I mean that was absolutely not the point.

PH I think that is absolutely right, Charlie Murray was really old school, he was very rhythm and blues.

TVS He really did try to come across, [to Punk thinking] but he was really stuck in old school. You know he's a thinker, he is a thinker, he was a lot better than a lot of them, but still, in that sense he didn't really get it you know. But it was a huge sea change. I don't know whether it would be the same now. But it was a huge sea change.

(Smith in conversation with the author, 29.3.08, London)

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Your little wearing rugby shirt in new contrasting colours with white collar. 100% cotton. **£3.29** + 25p P&P. Colours: navy, red, white, green, yellow, orange, pink, purple, blue, black, grey, brown, etc. Sizes: 32" to 38" chest, 34" to 40" bust. Please state your size and an alternative colour.

COTTON DRILL LOONS
A good quality cotton drill in the original hip. 2 piece top P&P. Colours: navy, white, green, red, yellow, orange, pink, purple, blue, black, grey, brown, etc. Sizes: 32" to 38" chest, 34" to 40" bust. Please state your size and an alternative colour.

CHEESECLOTH SHIRT
Sleeveless short sleeved top for the warmer weather. In stripes, checks, plain, white or brown blue only. **£2.79** + 25p P&P. Size 32" to 40" chest, 34" to 40" bust. Please state which design and your size.

SEND 110 SHIRTS POSTAGE OUTSIDE UK
DOUBLE: PLEASE WRITE YOUR NAME, FULL ADDRESS, COLOUR AND SIZE CLEARLY. ALL GOODS CAN BE EXCHANGED OR REFUNDED IF RETURNED UNWORN WITHIN 7 DAYS. SEND A P.O. CHEQUE TO:

SHAPES MAIL ORDER (Dept V)
252 High Street,
Widham Cross, Northampton EN6 8NL

Fly like an eagle



A carved melonshell eagle from the Far East on a fine silver chain. **£1.55** + 10p p&p.

Send cheque/p.o. to:
BOJANGLES (ext. NME)
25, Plantation Road
OXFORD
tel Oxford 511696

A catalogue of our other items is also available — please send an s.a.e. Wholesale catalogue also available.

CANNABIS LEAF
Fidelius Jewell
By popular request I designed a good highly detailed Cannabis Ring for you! A chunky silver ring at only £7.00. If we can make it adjustable I high real silver leaf pendant. A plated chain is £4.50 or on top silver chain £7.00. A 1/2" single on silver hook is £1.05. Joke, the rush and send money to:

ATLAS (Dept N),
40 SYDNEY ST. BRIGHTON.

Fig 22: advertisement for Glitterbest, New Musical Express, 18.6.77

This sea change can be seen in fig. 22 where an advertisement for McLaren's company Glitterbest from the New Musical Express in June 1977 is surrounded by advertisements for clogs, western boots, cheesecloth kurtas and cotton loons^{xv}. Stuckism, at this point in time, I believe is also an indication of a forth-coming sea change that critics will have to come to terms

^{xv} These items of clothing are all associated with hippy fashion.

with in the same way that writers on popular music and culture came to terms with Punk. I suspect that many critics genuinely do not understand it yet.

Chapter 5: Style and Feel

In this chapter I will examine the aspects of Stuckism that, in the light of their similarity with Punk, may need to be understood and debated by art critics in order for the proposed sea change to take place. It will be clear by now that the idea of authenticity has emerged in chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis as the key term by which I myself perceive correspondences between Punk and Stuckism. Here I return to the methodological concept of similarity introduced in chapter 2 in my short discussion of an idea in Eco's *Kant and the Platypus* (2000). The method involved distinguishing between types of likeness that were not evident until a criterion was provided. Loosely speaking that is what I propose to do in chapter 5: offer a criterion that makes the similarity between Punk and Stuckism understandable. Critics will not necessarily see the two movements as being similar unless they are given some rules that reveal how they resemble one another. To provide these criteria is the ultimate aim of my research and I will conclude my thesis with a discussion of the structural properties of Punk and Stuckism that seem to be similar now that we have established that authenticity is the criterion that uncovers likeness. As I said above (in section 2.1), in this way I intend to link two socio-cultural identities that belong to two quite separate contexts.

5.1 Reading about Style

I am going to begin by applying the criterion of authenticity to two terms that have continued to crop up throughout my exploration of the literature on the

Punk subculture and in my dialogues with the conversational partners I engaged in my interactive autoethnographic project. These are 'style' and 'feel'. They are, as we shall see, interesting opposites. In chapter 3, as I grappled with the nature of Punk attitude, I was frequently forced to contrast an academic use of the term 'style' with my own first-hand experience of being a provincial Punk. The term is used in both Hebdige's pioneering account and in Muggleton's later revision of the CCCS perspective. However, style is a less-straightforward concept than these debates about subculture suggest. Given that my research has been undertaken as a practice-led artist-researcher, I cannot ignore the long history this term has within the fields of art history (where it has been used to categorize the way that art objects are made in different places and times) and aesthetics (where it refers to the affirmative or pejorative judgements we make about the quality of an artist's creative performance). (Cooper, 1995, p. 403-406) It is in the latter discipline that reservations about the role of 'style' come to the fore. There is an established mode of aesthetic judgement (the *Blackwell Companion to Aesthetics* [1995] calls it a 'central tradition') that regards an 'unselfconscious' absence of style as a valued attribute of an artist's work. As we have seen above, this point of view figures in both Punk and Stuckism and aestheticians have often used alternative terms such as 'integrity and honesty' in their debates about the role of 'our subtlest moral concepts' in evaluating the way that an artwork has been created in relation to the 'deeper matters of the [artist's] thought and intention'. (Cooper, 1995, p. 404) In order to examine my own dislike of the term beyond the orthodoxies of traditional aesthetics, I want to investigate another word often used in music that seems to my

conversational partners to represent an experience of authenticity that is not captured by the literature on subcultures. This word is 'feel'.

5.2 Conversations about Feel

I asked a number of my conversational partners to try to define feel and to explain how they know when something has it. Childish wrote back:

feel

feel is "an intuitive speaking to the soul" it 'feels rite' cos its effortless correctness

(email correspondence with the author 12.1.09)

On the Stuckist website, Thomson discusses his working method:

I see my artistic influences from Japanese woodblock prints, Impressionism, Van Gogh and German Expressionism. I don't like Pop Art on the whole, because I find it uses the 'cartoon' style in a mechanical soul-less fashion. I depict what I experience as honestly as I can. This generates subject matter and style. I do line drawings spontaneously and uncorrected with a black wax crayon in a sketchbook. Then I choose one, blow it up on the canvas and paint the black line in acrylic. The colour is oil paint (Old Holland) and nearly always remains the first colour I paint in - though it can take an hour to mix it. I feel what the colour should be. The final image is a synthesis of material, emotional and spiritual experience.

(<http://www.stuckism.com/thomson/IndexText.html> accessed 21.8.11)

'Got any more impossible questions?' said TV Smith when I asked him about the difference between style and feel:

Obviously you can't define feel - you can only feel it.

Feel is the secret language that it's impossible to learn. You can learn musical notes but you can never learn to play with feel. If you're an artist you can learn technically how to use your brushes and paint - but you can never learn to paint with feel. Feel is what distinguishes true artists from the rest.

(email correspondence with the author 14.1.09)

Murray, in an earlier conversation, had described feel as the act of expressing human nature:

... it is the impulses of a human being and it is, you know, how fast your heart beats, it's the physical impulses of being a human being, you know. (Murray in conversation with the author 7.2.09, Newcastle upon Tyne)

Wolf Howard talks about feel in his biography on the Stuckist website, stating that 'I paint with oils, covering the canvas as quickly as I can and sometimes returning to it many times until I feel it is finished.'

(<http://www.stuckism.com/howard/IndexText.html> accessed 21.8.11)

This is a conversation many artists understand, although to define it and discuss is difficult. If artists and musicians are genuinely working with a Punk

attitude, I believe there will be an absence of style, as 'feel' overrides the need to be part of a set of visual, aural or intellectual rules. In Punk there were a second wave of bands that played in a style that they believed to be Punk, but this was missing the point. There were also though, bands such as *The Fire Engines*, who, although influenced by Punk, were not afraid to take risks and develop their own work without feeling the need to play in a certain style. This lack of style within a movement such as Stuckism makes it more difficult for critics to assess it; it is also evident not just in the work, but in style of dress, age group, class, nationality, political affiliations, subject matter, and so on.

5.3 Authenticity as a Criterion

The fact that a large Stuckist show such as *The Stuckists Punk Victorian* in 2004 (see Appendix v) is so diverse, not just in terms of style but in terms of feel, is it's strength, and shows an independent quest for authenticity coming from the artists. In his paper *Punk vs. Architecture* (2003), Brian Scott talks of Punk being...

a way of addressing creative practice so that the artist remains truly independent and able to freely pursue their work. In fact, it could be said that Punk rock really has no defined style... at first glance, there is an aspect of sacrifice involved in being 'Punk' because one is required to consciously refuse things that are readily offered by society, but the benefit is that this allows each person to re-establish some connection with their own environment, a connection that is sorely missed in the modern tradition (Scott, 2003, no page number)

Within academic writing on subcultures, style is important. Hebdige discusses style:

the challenge to hegemony which subcultures represent is not issued directly by them. Rather it is expressed obliquely, in style. The objections are lodged, the contradictions displayed, (and, as we shall see, 'magically resolved') at the profoundly superficial level of appearances: that is, at the level of signs To turn once more to the examples used in the Introduction, to the safety pins and tubes of Vaseline, we can see that such commodities are indeed open to double inflection: to 'illegitimate' as well as 'legitimate' uses. These 'humble objects' can be magically appropriated; 'stolen' by subordinate groups and made to carry secret meanings: meaning which express, in code, a form of resistance to the order which guarantees their continued subordination Style in subculture is, then, pregnant with significance." (Hebdige, 1979, p. 17)

These observations all have validity. However, as my conversational partners confirm, those embedded within a subcultural experience think of style as an inappropriate criterion for evaluating meaning. Here the idea of authenticity can be proposed as a method of linking Punk to Stuckism. Members of both movements appear to be making similar judgements about meaning in relation to music and artworks. It is clear that Punks and Stuckists value the authenticity of feel and do not have a high opinion of the self-conscious pursuit of style.

Cooper's *Blackwell Companion to Aesthetics* (1995) speculates that the absence of style praised by members of the two movements could be

considered a style in its own right. (Cooper, 1995, p. 404) It interests me that from the perspective of being a member of a subculture such as Punk, or an art movement like Stuckism, this proposition seems entirely inauthentic. It would be difficult to evaluate *The Stuckists Punk Victorian* exhibition as stylistically un-selfconscious because the artists involved are grouped by their commitment to a specific feel rather than a style. Here the criterion of authenticity suggests that provincial Punks and provincial Stuckists are very similar.

A Punk single, *Terminal Tokyo* (1979) by *Garage Class* had 'It's just an idea that does not involve style' printed across the back of its sleeve.

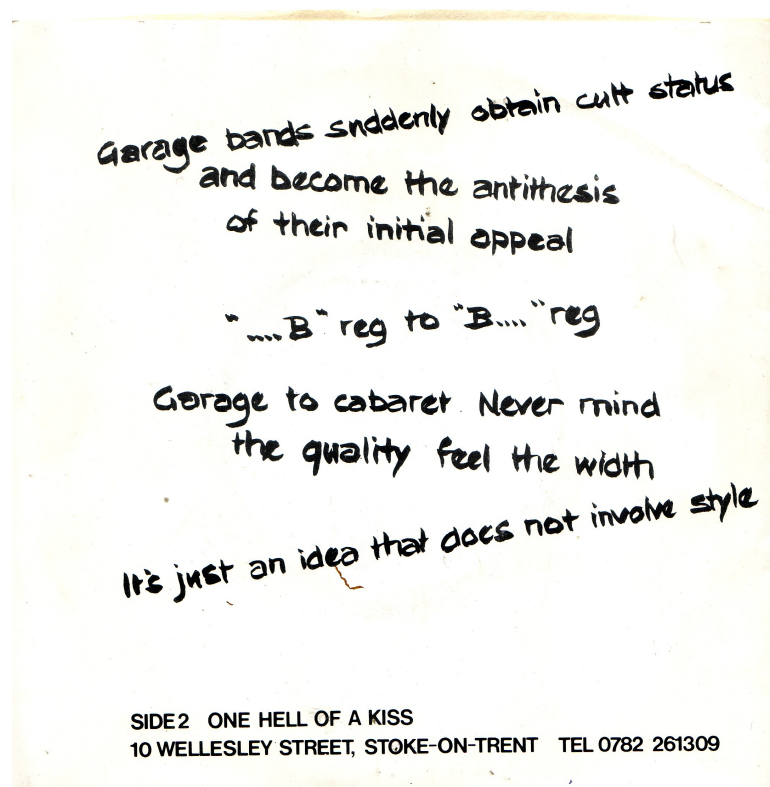


Fig 23: back cover of Garage Class single

This text was written by Tim Shutt, singer for the band at the time, and later singer for the *Happy Refugees*, mentioned above. Muggleton was using the idea of style in 2000 as a way to pick his informants, selecting them on what he regarded as their unconventional appearance. But as we have seen with Muggleton's subsequent work, the new century has had to look for new ways to define subcultures. This is why the more recent term 'post-subculture' became necessary.

5.4 Post-subcultures and Post-style

If we accept that the interpretation of appearance or style is no longer a valid anthropological approach, then perhaps contemporary researchers working the social sciences have, by themselves, begun to negotiate the complexities of this mode of evaluation, a form of judgement that is likely to privilege the view from outside. At the time of writing this thesis, the most recent discussions on authenticity, style, and Punk can be found in 'Authenticity in Culture, Self, and Society' (2009). In the chapter *The Ideology and Practice of Authenticity in Punk Subculture*, Lewin and Williams claim (regarding authenticity) that...

Contemporary writers have denigrated this orientation to life as a malaise of modernity and have dismissed the quest for authenticity as indicative of a "culture of narcissism" typical of the "me-generation" (e.g. Bell 1976: Lasch1979). These critics argue that striving for authenticity overemphasizes the value of the self relative to community and consequently narrows peoples' lives by making them poorer in

meaning. Such critiques, we believe, neglect to consider two properties of authenticity as a cultural idea, however. First, a moral compass generally guides the search for self-realization; it is not motivated by vanity or self-worship (Taylor 1992). And second, individuals celebrate authenticity in order to balance the extreme dislocation that characterizes life in the postmodern world, in which traditional concepts of self, community and space have collapsed. This collapse has led to a widespread internalization of doubt and an obsession with distinguishing the real from the fake (Allan1998). (Lewin & Williams, 2009, p. 66)

Lewin and Williams go on to discuss Muggleton's claim that, for those who subscribe to a subcultural style, expressing individuality rather than group affiliation always trumps any need for insider-status (they also attribute this idea to Widdicombe [1993; 1998] and Redhead [1999]). Here a post-subculturalist position is defined and promoted in which the concept of authenticity is employed as a device for eschewing membership of pre-defined groupings. Lewin and Williams' debate suggests to me that the point of Punk attitude was to promote 'post-style' communities. The point was to continually attempt to reject the influence of others by taking an individualistic approach to subcultural identity. (Lewin and Williams, 2009, p. 68) The problem has been that research into subcultural authenticity has focussed primarily on style and stylistic preference, a trend that has over-emphasized the fetishistic aspects of material culture and its consumption. For example, Hebdige's semiological analysis reduced the significance of Punk to its external material signs. In contrast, Lewin and Williams believe that Punks constructed a concept of authenticity that framed their subcultural participation within their ideological commitment to an independence from external influences. As a result, Lewin and Williams undertook their research using as

their informants personal acquaintances who identified themselves as Punks. This approach reflects, if not as intensely, my own methodological interests in co-constructed narratives in which research themes emerge within a shared experience of autoethnography. Through the Lewin and Williams approach, a wide range of political, religious, and class backgrounds came into focus as constituent sources of Punk, a revelation that backs up my own rejection of Hebdige's reliance on class as the defining factor of Punk attitude.

In this section I have explored how the concept of post-subculture attempts to address, from an academic researcher's point of view, the rejection of group identity through a shared quest for authenticity. Acts of rejection are considered by Lewin and Williams to be a tenet of the process of being authentic to Punk ideology. Although Lewin and Williams' interviewees rejected many aspects of 1970s society (consumerism, sexism, racism, and so on), all the informants couched these imperatives within a larger concern for anti-authoritarianism; they all wanted to destroy the power structures that undermine self-realisation. (Lewin & Williams, 2009, p. 72)

Clearly Stuckism also involves a level of rejection that mirrors the shared quest for authenticity described by Lewin & Williams' informants. The Stuckists want to topple the hierarchies that sustain conceptual art and from the beginning of the movement it was Thomson's stated aim that, in order to achieve self-realisation as a painter, one had to take on the art establishment.

Lewin and Williams describe their informants' 'distain for people who engaged in artificial performances in order to earn social approval' and praised behaviour that followed from 'intrinsic rather than extrinsic self-efficacy.' (Lewin & Williams, 2009, p. 73) The contemporary art establishment has failed to (and here I paraphrase Lewin & Williams) anchor its activities in instincts and impulses. For example, when an exhibition visitor views the artworks selected for the Turner Prize shortlist, it is very difficult to see past the institutional framework that constructs the idea of cultural contemporaneity for a contemporary public. Therefore, the quest for authenticity that links Punk to Stuckism could be defined as a desire for self-actualisation that is free from the established power structures.

5.5 Authenticity, Feel and Necessary Failure

If we accept that the concept of post-subculture frees the academic debate on Punk beyond the emphasis on stylistic appearance in the writing of Hebdige, it is also the contention of this thesis that the concept of post-style allows practice-led researchers in the arts to engage with the notion of 'feel' as a manifestation of authenticity. For creative practitioners operating either as Punk musicians or Stuckist painters, prior influences and acquired levels of technical knowledge (however rudimentary) will help define the feel of the creative work in hand. Nevertheless, through the criterion of authenticity, the feel of an artwork also takes on a moral dimension – what Cooper's *Blackwell Companion to Aesthetics* describes as the most subtle concepts that can be

attached to an artist's thoughts and intentions. (Cooper, 1995, p. 404) Here my concern is with feel as 'the untruth of style'. This interesting phrase is employed by Adorno and Horkheimer (1997) within a discussion of style in relation to Dadaist and Expressionist artworks at the beginning of the 20th century. They suggest that it is a sense of 'promise' rather than any sense of realized formal harmony or unity that lends new shapes to conventional social forms. (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1997, p. 131) These revolutionary artworks were able to transform reality through the feeling of promise they brought 'the necessary failure of the passionate striving for identity'. (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1997, p. 131) The idea that failure is a necessary attribute of art historical progress is relevant to my research because Dada and Expressionist ideas feature heavily within Stuckist writing on art. Artists such as Edvard Munch, Max Beckman, and Kurt Schwitters have been named as honorary members of the movement and the promise of necessary failure is celebrated in the Stuckist manifestos.

In these defining texts, Childish and Thomson dismiss the ego-artist's constant striving for public recognition. They say that this results in a constant fear of failure. The Stuckist manifesto states:

The Stuckist risks failure wilfully and mindfully by daring to transmute his/her ideas through the realms of painting. Whereas the ego-artist's fear of failure inevitably brings about an underlying self-loathing, the failures that the Stuckist encounters engage him/her in a deepening process which leads to the understanding of the futility of all striving. The Stuckist doesn't strive — which is to avoid who and where you are — the Stuckist engages with the moment.

(see Appendix i)

It becomes clear from this polemical writing that when Childish talks of needing the courage to be ‘dumb and make mistakes’, he is reinforcing the Stuckist principle that if conceptualists wish to be clever, ‘then it is the Stuckist’s duty to always be wrong’. (see Appendix i)

5.6 Authenticity and the Polemics of Manifesto Writing

In this section I will focus on the arena of debate created by the Stuckists, not by creating paintings or having exhibitions, but by promoting ideas aggressively through the medium of words. Here Childish and Thomson wanted to compete with the power of established critics and commentators in order to define Stuckism from the perspective of the artists involved, and to counterbalance the possibility of misinterpretation. As a result, another level of authenticity comes into view. It is clear from the transcripts of my conversations that many of the provincial Punks who participated in my research felt that their intentions had been both misinterpreted and misrepresented by music critics and cultural commentators. It is, I suggest, the criterion of authenticity that uncovers similarities between this first-hand experience of misrepresentation in the 1970s and the aggressive use of polemical writing by Stuckists in first decade of the 21st century. The criterion of authenticity unites two socio-cultural identities in two different contexts.

Therefore, the PR dimension of Thomson's approach to Stuckism is not just closely related to Punk, it is a reflection of the same post-subcultural and post-style engagement with authority. Whilst Thomson's confident use of the national media (especially the tabloids) may seem like a metropolitan strategy rather than a provincial tactic, his purposeful use of calculated anger is a manifestation of the quest for authenticity and, as such, represents a potent combination of Punk attitude and Stuckist polemic that is ignored by his critics. This is why I say that it is difficult to understand the sea change that Stuckism represents without some rules that reveal the similarity between the two movements.



Fig 24: Stuckist Turner Prize leaflet front cover

There is a radical difference in the impact of the polemical language used by the Stuckists and, say, the International Necronautical Society. Thomson argues that the plain-speaking that so offends the art press is an effective, and therefore, legitimate tool. As he remarked during one of our conversations...

man does simple things in a complex way and God does complex things in a simple way and the closer you are to God, which is like the essence of reality if you like, or another way of stating that, then the clearer and simpler things will be, the more you involve spirituality, the less choices there are to bother with, the more things are black and white, which is a very different black and white from a simplistic attitude. You see, science was trying to work something out and the guy who worked it out stated that it was $E=MC^2$. It's a bloody simple thing because when you get down to the truth it is simple. People make things complex because they're neurotic – complexity is neurosis and simplicity is truth. (Thomson in conversation with the author 15.1.09, Finchley, London)

In 2007 a member of staff at Tate Liverpool approached me at a social occasion and wanted to tell me how appalling she thought it was that Stuckists should criticise other artists. This evaluative reticence really took me by surprise. As a Punk it was natural to criticise anything or anybody you didn't like publicly, including the naming of names: there was no politeness. If you hated something you gave yourself every opportunity to express that

feeling. It had never crossed my mind that the diatribes against artists such as Damian Hirst and Tracey Emin could be considered in poor taste. Wolf Howard explained this Stuckist approach to me...

Yeah very comfortable... [with criticising other artists]. I mean I still really like the Stuckists and I think it is great that there is a group that says these things and I think it's really important and there is a real place for it. I'm the sort of person who goes to an exhibition and I am really, really angry to see all the shit that is on display basically, all the conceptual stuff, it's like a waste of time for me. I mean I knew that I didn't like conceptual art. I know it's a cliché and everyone feels the same which makes it more solid in my mind when you are going into a gallery and you are not sure that the fire extinguisher is a work of art or not. So on those grounds I was very pleased to be involved with the Stuckists and there is a lot of value to the stuff that they are saying.

(Howard in conversation with the author 14.4.08, Sun and Doves pub, London)

Childish described how he felt about Stuckist attacks on yBas:

It is not Damien Hirst's fault that he is taken seriously. I noticed that Damien Hirst has never said things about his art or art, particularly that I disagree with, apart from he said things like 'painting is dead'. But his assessment of his own art is very close to my assessment. He is quite self-critical and quite intelligent and I would contest quite mystified as to why the hell people take it on the level that they do and I have said it's not his fault that he is taken

seriously. (Childish in conversation with the author 17.4.08, just off Farringdon Road, London)

In retrospect, what the Tate Liverpool staff member must have been objecting to was the polemical language used by the Stuckists. There seems to be a problem when artists engage in crude rhetoric to denounce other artists. This is, for some unaccountable reason, not as acceptable as Punk musicians calling hippies ‘boring old farts’ or music critics dismissing Punks, with thinly disguised contempt, as nasty people who ‘cropped their hair like a shrub and tried to be as ugly and aggressive as possible.’ (Field, 1978, p. 229) I was never aggressive, and I never wanted to look ugly, and any old provincial Punk will agree that a shrub headed Punk girl with a tartan skirt was a beautiful thing to behold. Field was angry, but it wasn’t an informed, calculated anger:

They behaved like no other so called entertainers have ever behaved on stage before, abusing audiences and spitting and vomiting over them All the music press could talk about – suddenly – was new wave and Punk music. Few people in the industry dared to point out that it had all been done before. The music was simply revamped early 1960’s rhythm and blues. (Field, 1978, p. 229)

However the attitude was different: the approach was both openly negative and aimed at any cultural grouping that supported boring old farts. Field employs the kind of balanced argument that, for a Punk in the 1970s, could only reveal an unacceptable level of class bias. For Field the high profile youth rebellion of the ‘swinging sixties’ had been based on increasing

affluence but the 'current one seems to have festered on the dole queues'.
(Field, 1978, p. 229) Art criticism has been more polite. Cruel reviews are so rare that they are remembered and discussed decades later. An infamous and tragic example concerns the American painter R. B. Kitaj, remembered here by Jonathan Jones on his *Guardian* blog:

Kitaj accused newspaper critics of driving his wife to her death, then took his own life. One of his last exhibitions was called Draw Draw Is Better Than Jaw Jaw. The bad reception in London of his 1994 Tate retrospective caused him to move abroad (he was an American who had worked, up to then, in London). It seems he never got over it.

Looking at If Not, Not (the original painting is owned by the National Galleries of Scotland), I can't help but be angry at those critics. Why destroy an artist so cruelly? What was gained? Kitaj stood for a sense of history, a belief in drawing and an intelligent modernism. Are those such terrible qualities in an artist?

If Not, Not will be remembered when Kitaj's bad reviews, and their authors, are long forgotten. Stories like this make me wonder what my profession is actually for.

(<http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2010/jan/08/art-critics-r-b-kitaj> accessed 14.9.11)

Was Jones still wondering what his profession was for when he called the Stuckists 'enemies of art'? Clearly Stuckist artists do not deserve the same respect Jones demanded in his piece on Kitaj:

I chanced recently on the website of Stuckism International. I'm glad to see this art movement's opposition to most 21st century media does not include a suspicion of digital technology - it's a well-designed and efficient site. Efficient, that is, at putting out their ill-conceived, rabble-rousing nonsense.

My interest in Stuckism has never been very profound, so I had no idea it could boast such a large collection of manifestos. No other art movement today makes such use of this classic 20th century literary form. For that matter, is there any other art movement today? Any other-ism? Art in this century is so plural and various that artists generally seem able to get their ideas across without the aid of ideologies.

To which the Stuckists reply: that's because a single ideology, the deadening, anti-art ideology of Turner prize art, with its ready-mades, its videos and its acceptance of absolutely anything at all, (except figurative painting), holds art in an iron grip, and kills it.

But it is the Stuckists who are enemies of art. It is they who make it harder for sensitivity and creativity to thrive. I hate their cheap slogans. You should come to art with an open mind. This is not easy; the hysterical rants of the Stuckists make it harder. The ready-made can be a redundant cliché - or a poetic revelation. Painting can be the most majestic of art forms - or an ugly mess. To say "painting good, ready-made bad" is not a view of art - it's a prejudice. There are huge variations in the uses artists have made in the last 90 years or so, of found objects and to dismiss all these as detrimental to art is just not an argument. It's a surrender, a nervous breakdown.

The Stuckists are enemies of all they claim to love. Too much anger makes a stone of the heart.

(<http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2009/oct/01/art-stuckist-manifesto?INTCMP=SRCH> accessed 14.9.11)

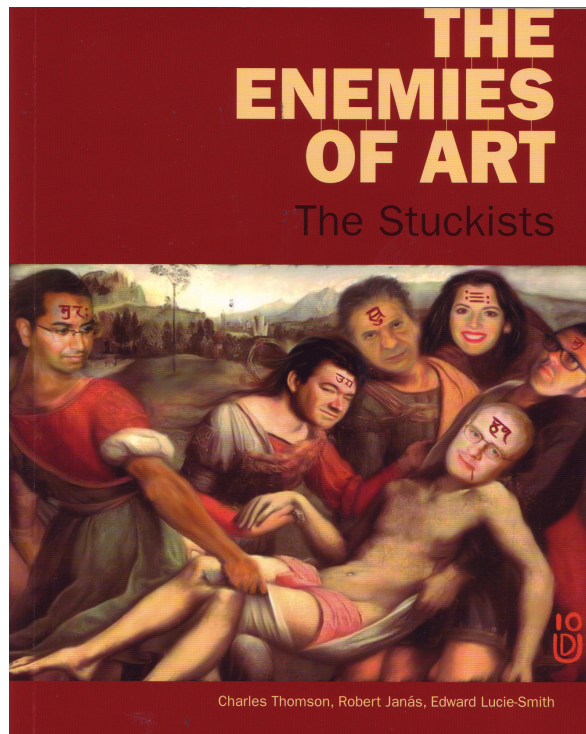


Fig 25: catalogue for the Stuckist show at Lauderdale House, Highgate, London

The term coined by Jonathan Jones was later used for the Stuckist show *The Enemies of Art* at Lauderdale House in London, April 2011. Jones had been made aware of this, and his face actually appeared in a painting on the cover of the catalogue. Possibly as a consequence, in March, just before the show, Jones had had a change of heart regarding the Stuckists:

What if the stuckists are right? Just a thought. Stuckism, for better or worse, has entered our language. It refers both to an actual organisation and, in art chatter, to the belief that British art is dominated by conceptual values to the point that it puts figurative painters at a serious disadvantage.

I've argued with the stuckists – indeed I've abused them, calling them the enemies of art. I object to their obsession with conflict and polemic rather than actually getting on with training themselves to be great painters (because great painters never stop learning). By insisting that painting v conceptualism is an ideological battle, they invite

a similarly ideological tone from their opponents. They have coarsened the debate.

They also miss out a third part of the equation – abstract painting, a profound tradition that evolved in the modern age. By setting "traditional painting" against conceptualist "modern" art, they ignore great modernist painters from Picasso to Cy Twombly.

But what if – in spite of their follies – they are right in their basic claim? In Britain today, there are more galleries and museums than ever before dedicated to the promotion of "modern art" as it is defined by the Turner prize. In this week's funding announcements, the Whitechapel gallery, the Serpentine gallery and other contemporary art venues got increases. David Cameron is getting Tracey Emin to do a neon for 10 Downing Street. The hegemony of Turner prize art crosses party lines, and is as evident in the Telegraph as the Guardian. Where, as the stuckists ask, does this leave skilled painters?

There is a palpable tension between painters and the current – inaccurate – British idea of what modern art is. If you reject the notion that physical skill, natural talent or technical training have any value as art in themselves, then painters are screwed. Painting has an astonishing history of technique and style, and all great paintings engage with that legacy in some way. Painting well is hard work. It takes time and knowledge. Will there be any Lucian Freuds around a century from now? Not unless we find space for talented and disciplined painters in our idea of art. Not unless we encourage young artists who are talented at drawing and painting to deepen those skills, instead of immediately turning to other media.

No novelist can win the Booker prize without being able to write. But if you said all artists must be able to draw, you'd be laughed at. I'm not trying to reimpose academic art education. But tolerance and creative freedom must be a two-way street. If artists are free to do what they like, this should also include the right to learn to draw and paint superbly well – and to have that ability recognised and valued.

(<http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2011/mar/31/painting->

This second piece of writing by Jones relates, I contend, to the grudging acceptance given to Punk by music journalists who were initially hostile in 1977, but realised it was having an impact in terms of a debate about the state of music - therefore they had to acknowledge it (at the same time putting themselves above it) in order to stay relevant. The aforementioned review by Charles Shaar Murray of *The Adverts* album is an example of this. Murray could see the effect Punk was having, including having a negative impact on his own work as a practitioner as he was playing a pub rock^{xvi} style rhythm and blues, a type of music that was going to be superseded by Punk. There was a similar condescending approach as we see with Jones. Jones insists that the Stuckists wish to return to 'traditional painting': this is a flaw in his analysis I feel, as investigation of the work will see that this is not the case. Is figurative painting automatically traditional? It is a meaningless term post modernism. When the architects of the Renaissance went back to classical ideas for inspiration, they did not wish to merely go backwards, they understood that in order to go forwards they needed to learn from the past. As Thomson put it...

It's like those people doing organic gardening, organic vegetables, they refuse to soak their fields in DDT, you know, they are going right back to the old way of doing it, without all these chemicals, they are completely stuck, and yet for

^{xvi} Pub Rock was a genre of music that developed in the mid 70s, just before Punk, and to some extent is considered a catalyst for it. Many pub rock acts are included in punk histories, including bands such as Eddie and the Hots Rods.

some reason or another the supermarkets are able to charge a higher price for these organic vegetables which once upon a time used to be called vegetables. (Thomson in conversation with the author 15.1.09, Finchley, London)

The argument that Jones puts forward is similar to the aforementioned Field when he talked of the music being made by Punks as being merely revamped early 1960's rhythm and blues. If the Stuckists coarsen the debate (through, I contend, an informed, calculated anger), then critics are certainly happy to coarsen it further. If a critic does not like a show, or an artist, there will, on the whole, be a mature attempt to analyse, to explain why this is so. The Stuckists however, provoke explicit, uncalculated anger, much like early Punk did, as the following quotes from the Stuckist website show:

They are just another media creation. Their work is such a pile of crap. They just want to rant and draw attention to themselves, too. There is this notion that there is the avant-garde and there are the fuddy duddies and if you are not with the avant-garde you are either a fuddy duddy or a Stuckist. Do us a favour! And the avant-garde is the establishment anyway. Where is the dissent? Where are the mavericks? I am generally just filled with dismay at the whole situation. (**John Keane**, *The Tastemakers* by Rosie Millard, page 209, Thames & Hudson, 2001.)

The sheer ineptitude of what almost everything the Stuckists so defiantly show and publicise is staggering (**William Packer**, *The Financial Times* 13.3.01.)

Be careful about expressing sympathy for Stuckism, though, as insider art world people find it hopelessly naive. (**Matthew Collings**, *Evening Standard* 12.10.01.)

Unimportant, mediocre opportunists (**Louisa Buck**, The Observer 11.12.05.)

I don't know if you've heard of the Stuckists? In the art world, they are the possessors of a shrill and tiny reputation as a bunch of schoolboy activists who make a point of complaining noisily about conceptual art. (**Waldemar Januszczak**, The Sunday Times 10.6.07.)

and my particular favourite:

Fucking Stuckists ... yes, you can quote me. (**Sarah Kent**^{xvii} to Stuckist demonstrators outside the Turner Prize 2003 7.12.03)

Interestingly, practitioners themselves have sometimes shown a more thoughtful attitude:

I think there are some interesting paintings in there. I would definitely say that people, if they're in Liverpool, should try and go and see the Stuckist exhibition as well. (**Gavin Turk**, BBC Collective (with audio), 24.9.04.)

The Stuckist protestors outside Tate Britain lend a festive air to the queue to get in. (**Grayson Perry**, The Times 6.12.06.)

The Stuckists have admitted that they based themselves a little bit on the Ruralists, but their anger is different. They're a different kind of group, but there was a link between the Stuckists and the Ruralists. (**Sir Peter Blake**, BBC Radio 5 Live, Simon Mayo show 12.7.07.)

(<http://www.stuckism.com/QuotesStuckismAbout.html> accessed 12.9.11)

^{xvii} Sarah Kent wrote a dismissive article on Stuckism in Time Out magazine in 2002.

All these quotes can be found on the Stuckism website (www.stuckism.com) which documents the story of the movement, with many artists contributing information. One of the areas discussed is Thomson's use of PR to promote both Stuckism and to attack institutions such as the Tate.



Fig 26: The Times article on Tate offer

In early 2005, during a period when the Tate had been pleading poverty, Thomson offered to donate one hundred Stuckist paintings to the nation's main collection of contemporary British art. The offer was rejected. Serota stated that the Tate staff did not feel that the work was of sufficient quality. The proposed artworks were not of sufficient accomplishment, innovation or originality of thought to warrant preservation in perpetuity in a national institution. The rejection wasn't a complete surprise even though the Tate's duty is to reflect the entire range of activity in British contemporary art. In order to explore the context of the Tate's response, it is worth pausing to consider the significance of exhibitions such as *Unpopular Culture* (2009), curated by the high-profile contemporary artist Grayson Perry. The exhibition included work from the Arts Council Collection (e.g. paintings by Alan Lowndes and John Bratby) created in the last half of the 20th century. In the catalogue Blake Morrison noted that these artists came from a range of social backgrounds and were committed to depicting the reality of the Britain they saw around them. (Morrison, 2008, no page number) It seems strange that 'unpopular' figurative artworks from the past century cannot be equated with unpopular figurative artworks from the present day.

Thomson would argue that the Tate has a history of failing to recognize important art events as they are happening and consistently missed opportunities of acquiring contemporary artworks at a reasonable price or, as in the case of the Stuckist bequest, for free. John Willet in *Art in a City* (1967) remarks on how the Pre-Raphaelite artists were feted during the 1850s by the

Liverpool Academy whilst still being shunned by London. This is an interesting parallel with *The Stuckists Punk Victorian* exhibition (2004) at Liverpool's Walker and Lady Lever Galleries which seems to indicate that this lively provincial city had accepted Stuckism at the same moment that the capital city's major art collection was rejecting a substantial gift by the artists.



Fig 27: Charles Thomson, John Bourne, Sir Nicholas Serota, and Joe Machine at *The Stuckists Punk Victorian* Show, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool

Thomson's response to the Tate's rejection was to investigate the way that decisions of this nature are made. However, to date, investigative journalists have ignored Thomson's evidence of possible malpractice within the operations of, it must be remembered, a major, publicly funded institution. The evidence in question included details concerning the purchase of Chris Ofili's *Upper Room*, a sequence of paintings that are displayed standing on elephant dung, and Thomson used the media to force Serota to apologise to the charities commission and accept that the Stuckists had acted in the public

interest.^{xviii} From the perspective of my research project, it is interesting that Thomson's battles with the Tate have evolved from being seen as the bitter raging of a thirty-something failure to a grudging respect for the Stuckist position. Whatever opinion one might form of this approach to art polemics, it is clear that Thomson has used his skills as a publicist to generate an expanding political frame for the Stuckist movement. Can we now expect an academic response?

5.7 Authenticity and Critical Writing on Stuckism

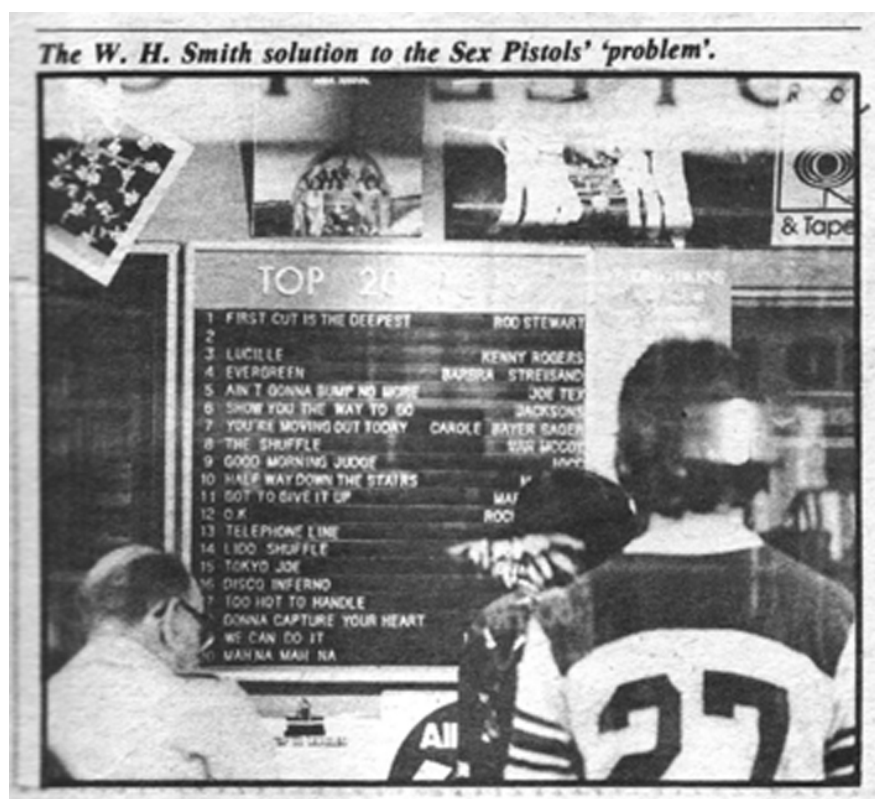


Fig 28: photo of W. H. Smith store, July 1977

^{xviii} This was due to Ofili being on the board of Trustees when they agreed to purchase his work. Ofili was asked to leave the room whilst this took place. Serota was later forced to apologise to the charities commission because of this conflict of interest.

Stuckism had been conspicuous by its absence as regards academic writing on contemporary art, much like the absence of the Sex Pistols *God Save The Queen* single on W. H. Smith chart in 1977 (see fig 28 above). I speculate that, as with Punk and the institutions of popular culture, the art establishment believed that if they ignored Stuckism it would go away. As this research drew to a close, Stuckism finally began to be recognized in academic texts as a valid art movement. Even the Tate includes the movement in its guide to modern art terms.^{xix} Unfortunately, as Stuckist ideas become part of a theoretical debate, will the same mistakes be made that were discussed above (chapter 3) in relation to the early critics of Punk? Bestley discussed the role of the cultural theorist in my conversation with him:

I touched on the authenticity debate, because I was told to by my supervisor, but didn't want to delve too deeply into that, and one of the reasons that I stick my neck out and say from the outset that I am not a cultural theorist is that I am quite interested in some cultural theory, but I think there's so much bullshit involved, and I see cultural theorists as sometimes... I'm going to be really negative now on tape, sometimes colonize a lot of peoples' worlds and other peoples' lives, and they will fish in different ponds, one week they'll be writing about Punk, or Punk in the provinces or whatever, and the next week they'll be writing about something completely different- and there's no connection

^{xix} Stuckism appears as an entry in *The Tate Guide to Modern Art Terms* (Wilson, S. & Lack, J.) published in 2008.

with the subjects they're looking at. (Bestley in conversation with the author
2.9.11, London College of Communication)

For example, in his book *Digimodernism* (2009), Alan Kirby (a professor of English Literature) comes to the conclusion that the Stuckists may just be right, but not in the right way. This is clearly a thinly veiled critique. It is almost as if he is annoyed that the Stuckists arrived before he did at a new cultural paradigm to replace postmodernism (the point of his book). However his central criticism is that Stuckist artworks are of 'marginal concern' to themselves. (Kirby, 2009, p. 25) My first-hand experience is that most Stuckists paint obsessively and care very much about their work. In relation to the autoethnographic approach used in this research, it is not an effective position to place oneself above the topic under investigation. Nor is it a particularly persuasive argument to both ridicule and take credit for a set of topical ideas. Kirby discusses the Stuckist's tendency to shift from art toward art criticism, again denying the main point of being a Stuckist – that is to paint. Kirby has clearly looked at the website (but not, it seems, spoken to any of the artists, not even Thomson), remarking that this site has allowed them to attract international attention. By 2004, he continues, the movement claims to have ninety franchised Stuckist groups in twenty-two countries. (Kirby, 2009, p. 26) Kirby's analysis hints at some kind of massaging of figures (he notes that no membership figures are given). In fact, as of May 2011, there are over 200 groups in 47 countries but membership is usually small: some have only one member, some no more than two (e.g. my own, the Newcastle Stuckists).

However, the movement is very active, promoting and curating exhibitions all over the world.

Kirby belittles the movement's small exhibitions saying that they were tepidly received but this may be a failure to appreciate the provincial nature of Stuckism. The first public gallery to hold a Stuckist exhibition was Wednesbury Museum (2003), promoted by Raj Patel, Head of Museums in Sandwell, near Birmingham. There were also, of course, the two major shows at the Walker and Lady Lever galleries in 2004 (for a full list of major Stuckist shows, see appendix vii, and for information on the Stuckists Punk Victorian show see appendix v). Like the early Punk bands, the Stuckists have put their work in the public domain in the most immediate way and perhaps Kirby needs to be reminded that the Roxy (an early venue for Punk bands in London) was very small, the sort of place that gigging musicians referred to as 'toilets', tiny cramped venues with the minimum of facilities. Everyone has to start somewhere. Kirby continues:

Despite all this, I'm loath to write off the Stuckists entirely. As with the New Puritans, their words and gestures are, like the odd behaviour of cattle before a storm, unwitting signals of wider, larger historico-cultural changes, which they don't comprehend. All three movements surveyed here [Kirby also mentions Dogme 95] make the same error: they construe postmodernism as no more than an artistic fashion, and so assume that, as one hemline is superseded on the catwalk by another, it can be sent on its way and replaced by a newer thing by a simple act of self-will. They clearly haven't read Lyotard or, more damagingly, Jameson. Postmodernist culture was rooted in all kinds of historical, social, economic, and political developments; it was the aesthetic expression of epochal shifts engulfing

millions of people. It would take something wrenchingly huge to sweep this away; I believe digital technology, essentially, is that something.” (Kirby, 2009, p.27)

In relation to Kirby’s accusation of Stuckism not being able to comprehend these ‘larger historico-cultural changes’, I would suggest that these changes were actually foreseen by Childish and Thomson in 1999 (ten years before the publication of Kirby’s book) and are therefore embedded in the Stuckist manifestos. For example, Thomson stated the following in *The virtual Stuckists January – July 1999* and in his essay *A Stuckist on Stuckism* from *The Stuckists Punk Victorian* catalogue (2004):

Ella (Guru) provided the expertise to start the Stuckist web site, and I spent hours with her cooped up in the room she shared with Sexton (Ming) off Holloway Road. It was an exciting project and there was the sense that we could reach out to the world. However, for the first few months there were only thirty-two hits on the site, thirty of them from Ella updating the site (and the other two, we suspect, from Frances (Castle)). The site kept chugging quietly along and now it’s over 100,000 – and not all from Ella. Most of the Stuckist groups have made their initial contact through the site. Stuckism is the first significant art movement to spread via the internet.” (Thomson, 2010, p. 9)

Kirby does recognise the provincial dimension of Stuckism, but sees it as a negative factor, remarking that ‘almost all of the original twelve members (there were, in fact, thirteen) were failed thirty-something artists from the corner of southeast England where suburban meets provincial’. (Kirby, 2009, p. 26) This attitude seems ageist. Clearly, for Kirby, if you have not had some degree of success by your mid-thirties you are left ‘hoping to build a career

out of a noisy rejection of the dominant artistic fashion'. (Kirby, 2009, p. 26) Even though Kirby discusses the importance of 'four classic singles' by *The Sex Pistols*, he fails to link their attitude as Punk musicians with Stuckism. (Kirby, 2009, p. 207) It seems that academic writers such as Kirby do not have the criteria to recognize similarities between the two movements and, therefore, make the same mistakes as music critics and newspaper journalists made about Punk. I contacted Kirby to ask if he wanted to become a conversational partner in my research but didn't receive a reply.

Even though Stuckism is starting to appear in academic texts, we still have to look to critical writers such as Kirby to provide 'insight'. My research is an attempt to offer ideas to critics from my position within the movement. Without the criterion of authenticity, I suggest, it is very difficult to interpret and represent ideas that are developing as the critic is writing. Janet Street-Porter^{xx} interviewed the Sex Pistols in 1977 for television and, more recently, discussed Stuckism. Street-Porter has a significant media profile. In the Channel 4 programme *The Genius of British Art* (transmitted 2010) she described Damien Hirst as 'shrewd and determined, even when he was a student, when he followed Punks do-it-yourself motto and created Freeze, a museum-exhibition of students work in an abandoned docklands warehouse.' When discussing the Hirst's *A Thousand Years* (1990), a piece consisting of steel, glass, flies, maggots, MDF, insect-o-cutor, cow's head, sugar, and water, she remarked 'I remember the shock of seeing it. It was exactly like the

^{xx} Janet Street-Porter is a media personality in journalism and television, and was reporter on the London Weekend show from 1975 to 1979, where she interviewed the Sex Pistols.

first time I saw the Sex Pistols, disgusting and brilliant. Overnight, British art became sexy and glamorous.’ At one point Street-Porter tells Hirst that he has made art as interesting as comedy and rock and roll. Perhaps this statement relates to Barzun’s dismissive observation that ‘the Interesting ... has replaced the Beautiful, the Profound, and the Moving’. (Barzun, 1973, p. 17) Barzun was responding to the growth of conceptual practices within contemporary art in the same decade that I was aligning my creative ambitions with Punk. It ‘interests’ me a great deal that as a Stuckist I can relate Barzun’s insight to an approach to painting that often resembles Punk attitude even though qualities such as beauty and profundity were not exactly on our agenda. It is also interesting that Street-Porter’s support of the yBas has led her to dismiss Stuckism. In *The Independent* (18.5.06) she wrote...

Every time a new list of nominees is announced for the Turner Prize, it elicits [sic] a feeble knee-jerk reaction from an embittered group of artists known as the “Stuckists”. Who cares what this irrelevant small coterie of self-publicists think? They seem to spend their time getting publicity by denouncing conceptual art as the devil’s work. The Turner Prize and Becks Futures both entice thousands of young people into art galleries for the first time every year. They fulfil a valuable role and the Stuckists should put up or shut up. It’s time they changed their tune.

It seems, however, that it is the commentators who are changing their tune. Danchev’s publication *100 Artists’ Manifestos From the Futurists to the Stuckists* (2011) acknowledged the Stuckist manifestos as examples of a long tradition of radical writing by artists. Danchev thinks of the Stuckists as a tonic to the tired politics of the contemporary art world. He celebrates the position

the group has taken up as an English *arriere-garde*, suggesting that Wyndham Lewis^{xxi} should be living at this hour to help blast conformist Britain. (Danchev, 2011, p. 426)

5.8 Authenticity and the Post-Conceptual

In September 2011, as I was working on the final draft of this thesis, Stuckism was featured in Grant Pooke's book *Contemporary British Art*. Pooke devoted a whole section to the movement within a chapter entitled *Post-Conceptual British Painting*. He discusses how Stuckism's members have self-consciously cultivated the identity of maverick outsiders, seeing painting as a matter of 'experientially developed craft and personal technique... Rather than a conceptual identity based around an art school ethos (Goldsmiths College or the Royal College of Art), many of the founder members of Stuckism share a distinct regional identity and affiliation'. (Pooke, 2011, p. 106) Therefore Pooke notices the provincial character of Stuckism; he seems to intuitively understand how to apply the criterion of authenticity to post-subcultural and post-style attitudes shared by the Stuckists and the Punks.

Remarkably, Pooke also notes similarities between the 'humanistic' approach he observes in Stuckist art and the aims of a landmark exhibition *A New Spirit in Painting* (1981) held at the Royal Academy in London. The curators of this

^{xxi} Wyndham Lewis was co-founder of the Vorticist movement in 1915 and edited its literary magazine *BLAST*.

show claimed that the time-honoured practice of painting had a 'privileged claim to authenticity', it is 'the medium's direct expressivity' that 'underlined the durability of painting as a genre'. (Pooke, 2011, p. 77) This resemblance between the Stuckist attitude and the ambitions of a group of curators in the early 1980s is truly remarkable because the exhibition team included a young Nicholas Serota. Is it possible that Pooke has identified a hidden, and certainly unexpected, layer of resemblance between the experience-oriented Stuckists and the conceptualist sympathies of the current director of the Tate? Is it possible that the criterion of authenticity could link the revival of painting in 1980s Britain that is associated with artists such as R. B. Kitaj (see section 5.6 above) and the figurative ambitions of the Stuckists in the first decade of the 21st century? Here it will be Pooke's notion of the post-conceptual that corresponds to my earlier discussion of post-style and the post-subcultural.

Pooke's straightforward analysis, devoid of anger or bias, indicates a maturing critical engagement with Stuckism as it settles in to the fine art environment. Just as Punk eventually became part of the popular music mainstream, Stuckism is gaining acceptance. The question now is: will the movement continue to grow in influence and eventually be seen as an important and positive development, or will it be relegated to a mere footnote in politics of 21st century British art?



Fig 29: the author in 2011

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In this final chapter, I will discuss my practice in relation to an investigation into the concept of authenticity, as discussed in chapters 4 and 5 above. To do this I need to place my own thoughts alongside a vast body of literature on this complex word, a field of reading that would take me through the major writers of Modern philosophy. Nevertheless, authenticity is clearly an inescapable term in this thesis. Pooke's discussion of Stuckist art, which closes chapter 5, states that the practice of painting has a 'privileged claim to authenticity'. (Pooke, 2011, p. 77) This is the motif that has occurred throughout my research from the moment that Thomson introduced and defined the concept (linking it to the need for a Stuckist to be honest).

My main source for exploring the implications of authenticity is Golomb (1995) who draws on the thinking of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Camus, and Sartre. These writers have set the terms for a debate on authenticity which has had, beyond its wide academic influence, an important impact on popular culture through the absorption of existentialist ideas from the late 1940s. My attitude as a provincial punk in the 1970s was certainly influenced by the image of the radically self-assertive individual driven by personal commitment and the need to make political choices. This idea is clearly based on Sartre. Whilst musicians and artists, in responding to post-war popularist existentialism, have both picked up and then abandoned these ideas (as Modernism became Postmodernism), Golomb makes it clear that the academic discourse on authenticity was also rooted in a philosophical journey from acceptance to rejection, particularly Sartre's acquiescence to, and later rejection of, Heidegger's view of the courageously authentic individual. (Golomb, 1995, p. 129) The debate continued into the second half of the twentieth century with Foucault's dismissal of the centralized subject in Sartre and Barthes (1978) influential attack on the primacy of authorial intention.^{xxii} These ideas were the pivotal point at which concepts such as authenticity, along with those of truth and justice, were eclipsed by the scepticism of the Postmodernist period. It is this sense of cynical mistrust, especially in relation to the goals of contemporary artistic practices, that Stuckism, in turn, rejects.

^{xxii} see Flynn, T. R., (2005) *Sartre, Foucault, and Historical Reason*, Volume Two: A Poststructuralist Mapping of History, Chicago: Chicago University Press.

My research has, to an extent, been a negotiation of the Foucauldian idea that, as Hoy and McCarthy report in *Critical Theory* (1994), a widespread socio-political estrangement has undercut our ability to understand what we are ourselves up to. (Hoy & McCarthy, 1994, p. 227) The approach I developed mirrors that of Hoy & McCarthy who recognise that the inability to have one right answer does not render public deliberation about concepts such as self-fulfillment and authenticity pointless. (Hoy & McCarthy, 1994, p. 237)

In the context of this thesis, many of my conversational partners expressed a desire to contribute to what Trilling (1971) called 'a common concern for the defence of the 'honest soul', with its definitive quality of single-mindedness and sincerity'. (Trilling, 1971, p. 72). Against the flood of Postmodern scepticism that characterises the dominance of the yBas, my investigation into the concept of authenticity highlights a lack of consensus and, remembering that my thesis limits its engagement to Punk and Stuckist practices and the efficacy of calculated anger, suggests that there is room for more debate.

6.1 Researching Authenticity on my Own

In July 2011, Waldemar Januszczak stated that 'Few activities embarked upon by humans are as purely egotistical as being an artist. The task seems to consist chiefly of expressing yourself while listening to the radio'. (Januszczak, 2011) This is essentially what I do. If I was looking for a published description in which I could immediately recognize myself, Januszczak was fairly close. In

the first months of PhD registration, as I was deciding how to undertake practice-led research as a Stuckist artist, my task had been to design a project that was rooted in this everyday, egotistic experience of painting.

Unlike my experience of being a provincial Punk, as a practising Stuckist, with 30 years of creative activity behind me, I felt ready to reflect on events, to analyse my practices as an artist as they were happening. At 17 you just 'do', but at 47 there are more opportunities to place even the most subtle studio habits within larger frames and contexts. Both my academic reading about style and my practitioner conversations have helped me arrive at the kind of co-constructed narratives that Davis and Ellis (2008) see as the goal of interactive autoethnographic research. Even though I had to be both a Punk musician and a Stuckist painter to detect the similarities that are the topic of this thesis, paradoxically, the process of my research has continually put pressure on me to step outside my ego-focused studio life. Similarly, even though I could not have shared autoethnographic conversations with other Punks and Stuckists if I had not totally immersed myself in both movements, nevertheless my immersion in my studio work has been continually modified by an expanding set of shared judgements about art derived from my conversational partners. This has not been a comfortable position for me because, from the time I became a Punk, my creative practice had always involved a degree of tunnel vision. Here the tension between personal obsession and communal judgement turned out to be the core challenge of designing a methodology for my practice-led research.

As my research developed, the challenge became to engage with the concept of authenticity in my studio as well investigate it as a criterion of similarity within the books I was reading on Punk and through the interactive autoethnography I was pursuing with fellow Stuckists. In my paintings I was exploring the non-interactive aspects of my subjective and emotional involvement with the problem of being authentic. Unfortunately, the complicated philosophic and critical debates that surround this concept had an increasingly negative effect on my practice. My studio thoughts seemed far more contrived than they needed to be. I became too self aware, too conscious of the intellectual context of Stuckist painting. Undertaking practice-led research was affecting my practice.

Here the Stuckist celebration of authenticity came to the fore. In an attempt to locate myself within my practice, I began in 2008 to assemble archives that would give me access to genuinely personal subject-matter for my paintings. I concentrated on material that recalled the experiences that had shaped my life, experiences that have (in one way or another) stayed with me. For example, momentos from childhood holidays, publications associated with the Apollo Moon mission, a Meccano set (the popular toy), assorted Tiger comics, Airfix models, photographs from a school trip to Switzerland and so on. Later material was related to my engagement with Punk, Czechoslovakian New Wave film, the film *Radio On* directed by Chris Petit (1979), and a visit to the Van Gogh Museum (2000). More recent archives focussed my time as a Stuckist. Although I collected family photographs I also found 35 mm transparencies and snapshots in second-hand shops. From all this material I

began to piece together a compositional process for my paintings that mixed personal, sometimes intimate, memories with themes that were socially and politically common to the period in which I progressed from Punk to Stuckism.



Fig 30: on holiday in Ibiza 1967 with the author far left



Fig 31: found transparency 1



Fig 32: found transparency 2



Fig 33: found transparency 3

My archives were the source of paintings such as *Self Portrait with Radio On* (2009), an exercise in replicating stills from Petit's film and situating them in relation to my life in the late 70's. The painting juxtaposes stills from the film with a photograph of myself. The effect is not an investigation into the ideas expressed in the film, rather it is an attempt to bring together the constituent parts of my provincial experience as Punk shaped my cultural identity. My intention was to communicate the localized impact of Petit's images. For me this is a visual exploration of the way cultural experiences stimulate a sense of authenticity.



Fig 34: Paul Harvey *Self Portrait with Radio On* 2009

Other works, such as *Buffet* (2009), explicitly combine my memories of playing with Meccano with decorative elements that have an immediate

likeness to Art Nouveau design. These kinds of imaginary associations remind me of the complicated way in which an authentic identity is constructed. *Buffet* also includes a reference to a trip to Switzerland as a child (my first experience of a baguette) and a homage to Giotto, added for no particular reason other than the powerful influence this artist has had on my understanding of how paintings generate pleasure. However, after completing these paintings, the process of writing my thesis began to cast a shadow of inauthentic self-consciousness across my studio practice. It became clear to me, and others who regularly visited my studio that I was trying too hard.

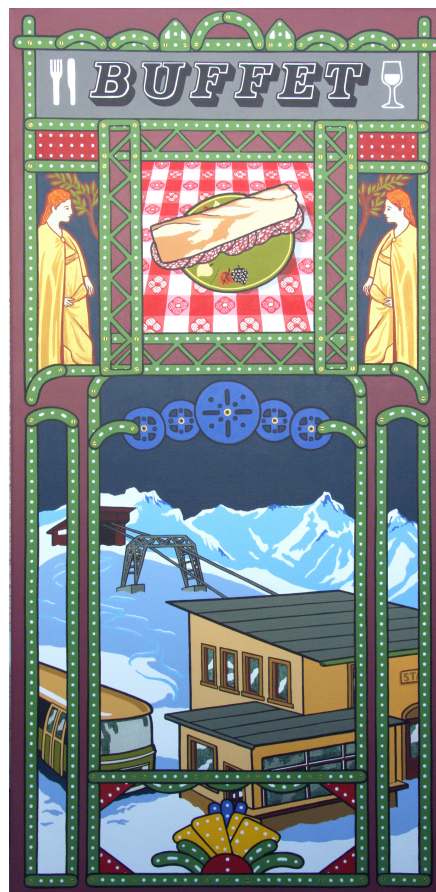


Fig 35: Paul Harvey *Buffet* 2009

In order to understand how the criterion of authenticity, having acted as a catalyst for understanding the similarities between Punk and Stuckism, became an anti-catalyst for my practice, I constructed a matrix that documented in year-long columns every painting produced during my research (see appendix vii). By placing the progress of my reading and my interactive autoethnography in rows across the top of the columns, it was possible for me to see how my absorption in intellectual ideas affected my painting activities.^{xxiii} This matrix reveals to me a clear dip in integrity as I contrived to engage in acute autoethnography with other Punks and Stuckists.

Once I was in a position to see my personal sense of authenticity changing during my research, I began to question the institutional structuring of creative practice that shapes doctoral research even in the arts. It is interesting that the do-it-yourself approach discussed in this thesis is actually a critique of the academic system in which I was trying to operate as a researcher. My own studio offered the most direct opportunity to understand my own capacity for authenticity and examining (and then reflecting on) the matrix forced me to take back ownership of my activities as an artist. The intellectual focus of my reading of Pooke's post-conceptual and Muggleton's post-subcultural, even my own reflections on the post-style identity of Punks and Stuckists, lacked the 'feel' of integrity that I needed to understand the importance of the criterion of authenticity. However good I was becoming at reflexive self-awareness, at objectively processing information, my hope was that, once the

^{xxiii} I need to acknowledge the influence of Russ Bestley in the design of this matrix. It was the matrix of Punk rock record sleeves and provincial Punk history in Bestley's PhD thesis that encouraged me to attempt a similar chart for my own research.

research was completed, I would continue my egotistical life in the studio as a better painter – Stuckist or otherwise.

At this point I needed to produce 'bad' paintings in order to return to the directness I associated with being 'better'. Once the final draft of the thesis was in place I found that I could accept the inevitable influence of the Postmodern environment on my own position as an artist. In fact, the tension between my own Modernist tendencies and practices derived from Conceptual Art became a strength. In this way I regained control of my ambitions as an artist and started to produce paintings such as *Henry Williamson sits outside his writing hut reflecting on his role as a father* (2010). Here I brought together compositional elements in the unselfconscious manner I value above artistic knowingness. I could do this even though I now feel sure that contemporary art audiences will see my juxtapositions of popular, personal and historic elements as ironic (in the Postmodern use of the term). For me the landscape I created in this painting by referencing Giotto comes alive in my provincial imagination when I combine Late Medieval Italy with images of my first girlfriend (who happened to own a Mini) and a camping trailer from a found transparency – such collisions of experience speak to me of the authentic.



Fig 36: Paul Harvey *Henry Williamson sits outside his writing hut reflecting on his role as a father* 2010

6.2 Researching Authenticity with Others

The matrix of studio activity that captured the development of these ‘better’ paintings reveals that I began to rediscover my sense of authenticity whilst working on a series of paintings for the exhibition *Unfinished Business* (2011) at the National Trust property Wallington Hall in Northumberland. This exhibition included contributions from a wide range of artists working in the North East of England and so by agreeing to participate I was placing my work alongside the full range of contemporary practices that the Stuckists reject.



Fig 37: A Stuckist Room 1



Fig 38: A Stuckist Room 2



Fig 39: A Stuckist Room 3

The paintings I produced for the exhibition were destined for a Stuckist Room situated on the ground floor of Wallington. The idea, put to me by my supervisor Chris Dorsett, was to utilize the grand interior of a large country house to explore the feel of Stuckism within an exhibition that mixed the contemporary and the historical. All the artists involved were asked to respond to the murals at Wallington by the Pre-Raphaelite painter William Bell Scott, whose bicentenary was being marked by the exhibition. Here I was immediately reconnected to the work I produced for *The Stuckists Punk Victorian* exhibition in Liverpool but, simultaneously, asked to depart from usual Stuckist practices – Dorsett was, in effect, making me create a site-specific installation, not an exhibition of paintings. Despite this clear challenge to my integrity as a Stuckist, I found that the process stimulated an internal conversation about honesty and truth in art. Through this, for me, highly

experimental project I began to uncover a need to communicate with an audience as genuinely as possible. As I discussed the Stuckist movement^{xxiv} with visitors to the house, I explored ways to help intensify their experience in a simple and unpretentious manner. There was a commonality to the sense of authenticity I felt. I realised how easy it is for artists to practice complexity as a kind of neurosis. The Stuckist Room was a form of direct action on behalf of the movement and the feedback I received from National Trust staff suggests that it was a very popular part of *Unfinished Business*.



Fig 40: Paul Harvey *Art & Leisure* 2011

Whether painting pictures or writing and playing music, I have always tended towards direct activity – it is part of the do-it-yourself ethos of both Punk and Stuckism and conceptualist approaches are, however interesting, a deterrent

^{xxiv} Besides the seven paintings I produced for the show, I also included seven paintings by other Stuckist artists.

to the kind of personal vision that needs to be tested in the context of immediate reception by an audience. Over many years I have known both musicians and artists to attempt to squeeze their practices into prevailing trends, and failing. At Wallington I discovered that I could not stop painting and take up installation work simply because it is the prevailing trend. However, I did find that, as I worked hard on designing the mode of display used in the room, the arrangement added to the visitor experience: it helped to communicate a feeling. In the same way that the arrangement of furniture in the Central Hall at Wallington meaningfully co-exists with the Bell Scott murals on the walls of that room, the furniture and objects I arranged in the Stuckist Room were furnishings, not art. My chairs were for sitting on. But the experience of curating this room with Dorsett became an exploration of the way in which Stuckism can work with, rather than against, other modes of creative practice. The criterion here is, as in the academic part of my research, the sense of authenticity that is activated by the activities involved. *Unfinished Business* proved to me that if one is working alongside practitioners who work with integrity, then areas of commonality are rapidly found. Here commonality is the practical version of similarity.

6.3 Thomson's Non-Punk Vision

If Punk and Stuckism start to look alike when you apply the criterion of authenticity, then differing art practices start to resemble each other when a sense of authenticity is communicated across the divides of different kinds of

creative practice. At this point my thesis will begin to conclude by considering how Stuckism moves beyond the similarity to Punk that has been the central theme of my research.

Punk rejected everything, but the hippy element of Stuckism takes my research in a different direction. According to Thomson, who is as steeped in 1960s counterculture as he is in 1970s provincial Punk, Stuckism is a complete vision:

CT ...what I am saying is that there is a whole vision. It's not taking an easy route, which Punk did. If you take an easy position it's an easy one to hold to.

PH Yeah

CT But it is also a flawed one which will end and destroy itself. If you want longevity then you have to have completion, wholeness, and the hippy thing took rather less of a partial position than Punk did. It was more embracing: it was based a lot more on spiritual ideas... at the end of the day we are all people, you know, we are all humans, we need to work together, you and I, you and you and me. It was that idea.

(Thomson in conversation with the author 11.3.09, Finchley, London)

Despite the problems inherent when using the concept of authenticity, it is clear that the term is continually active within the debates examined in this thesis. For example, I discussed Punk-Stuckist ideas of authenticity with Muggleton, referring to the Stuckism and Punk Manifesto written with Charles Thomson in 2010 (see appendix iii). He responded as follows:

DM all this makes total sense to me... Oh yeah, well ok 'Punk is right force and right action', yeah, these are statements to me that are evidently true... 'that authenticity is honesty', yeah of course it is because dishonesty isn't authenticity it is almost like being false, fake, it is bad faith.

PH In later years we are going to have a lot of problems with that word and so I have had to look into authenticity and, of course, you know, you also referred to that term, and when I interviewed Charles about it, I said "what is authenticity, we need to know what it is", well he said to me it's honesty and I said ok, but I have read other books, you know, by, em, by kind of philosophers and they are saying actually honesty is a bad word to use when talking about authenticity. So again you get into different arguments, but it makes sense to me.

DM It makes sense to me. Authenticity to me is a kind of thing that came when people, em, had this idea that we became autonomous beings and had a soul... and the idea was, in society when you all base it very much on the idea that you were doing similar kinds of tasks; no divisional labour, you knew your place. It wasn't about expression of soul, it was about the Church and

King, and the argument made no sense because you probably didn't understand the world. Once you became the idea of a, a person who had their own soul, had their own being, that's Renaissance or it's the idea of erm, Romanticism, that gave you the idea you could be an individual person who could express themselves. But if you didn't express yourselves in a faithful way, you were dishonest and inauthentic...

PH Yeah

DM Yeah. Perhaps that's where it comes from, so authenticity and honesty makes perfect sense to me.

PH Right

DM Why I don't like the idea of authenticity being truth is because, what is authenticity for one person, is not to the other,

PH Exactly yeah,

DM you know, but what is honesty is perfectly ok. Within the current time frame of a kind of a last few hundred years, to me, if you're being authentic, it is a bit like saying "I am trying to be true not false", and to be true, it's to say what's true to me, the idea I have got a soul or a, not a soul but a kind of individual person, persona, that I have to be faithful to and if I look at myself in

the mirror and I say I have not been true to myself, I feel guilty and that's authenticity to me, so I can agree with that totally.

(Muggleton in conversation with the author 10.12.10, Holborn, London)

Throughout this thesis I have continually returned to the concept of authenticity despite the pitfalls because I believe that Stuckist artists use the term to great effect. For better or for worse, the idea is embedded in their practice. This is certainly why Thomson is prepared to name artists and modes of artistic practice that he thinks are inauthentic:

PH So are we saying by default then that the artists that we criticise publicly, are we saying they are dishonest?

CT Yeah, that is not to say they are deliberately doing something that is dishonest because they may not know any better, they may be quite sincere, but if you are a very limited person, or if you are affected by things which you are actually not acknowledging properly, then you are going to have a dishonest practice.

(Thomson in conversation with the author 15.1.09, Finchley, London)

Punk was surely authentic to the time in which it occurred and it remains to be seen whether the same is true of Stuckism. The movement could be seen as merely the plaything of a charismatic individual (Thomson), but it is to be hoped that my research reveals that the Stuckists have a point. They may turn out to be fighting for the soul of British art. They are probably not what Sarah

Kent (art editor of Time Out) described as 'nothing more than a bunch of Bayswater Road-style daubers, without an original idea between them'. (Kent, 2002) This thesis makes it clear that the Stuckists have never claimed to be original.

6.4 Final summary: Commonality trumps Rejection

There is no doubt that the Stuckists are serious in their hostility to conceptual art. This is what I have called 'calculated anger'. However, the members of the movement are also very serious about the quality of their activities as painters. My interactive autoethnographic investigation suggests that the values of Stuckism are related to the same quest for authenticity and uncensored expression that motivated Punk. Whilst the main thrust of Stuckist thinking is definitely an extension of Thomson's own career as an artist, he increasingly submerges his ambitions in the promotion of other members of the movement. This commitment is driven by a shared sense of the falsity of British contemporary art. However, the final stages of my research have explored how this sense of rejection moves beyond the totality of Punk disillusionment. The Stuckists are only anti-establishment because, as Thomson says, 'the establishment is crap'. The artists involved will work alongside the art establishment when it has more integrity. Thompson is convinced that in fifty years time Tracey Emin will only be remembered for inadvertently giving birth to Stuckism.

Whilst writing this thesis, I have come to believe that Stuckist paintings are very likely to be exhibited at the Tate, but only because Stuckism has a holistic approach that takes elements of Punk attitude and marries them to the opposite: that is: commonality and acceptability. Stuckism is interested in the whole, not the partial, whereas Punk was primarily engaged in the partial. In this sense Stuckism may be seen as the maturing of both provincial Punk attitude and the counter culture of the 1960s. As a result, Thomson uses Eastern philosophy, the Brotherhood of Ruralists, Frank Rutter and, of course, Van Gogh as emblems of how Stuckism can transform both art and society. Whilst Punk wanted to be outside society, Stuckism wishes to challenge society to find an authentic harmony within itself. These ideas certainly relate back to Thomson's love for the ideas expressed in the alternative magazines such Oz, which he read avidly as a teenager in the 1960s.

For my own part, these ideas are discomfiting. As a provincial Punk of the late 1970s I was suspicious of anything associated with hippy culture. When Malcolm McLaren and Jamie Reid, the two people most responsible for the widespread impact of the Sex Pistols, told me to 'never trust a hippy' I believed them. It is still difficult for me to shake off that feeling – Punk attitude is deeply engrained. Nevertheless, it is probably Thomson's non-Punk vision that will drive the Stuckist project forward. Thomson may be ambitious but, paradoxically, he continues to promote the work of other artists (including myself) above his own. This can be seen in the fact that very rarely is his work shown on the covers of books or catalogues.



Fig 41: Charles Thomson *Sir Nicholas Serota makes an acquisitions decision* 2000

Although this thesis has discussed how ideas are slower to break through and become accepted in art than in popular music, even Punk took a while to become accepted by more than just the new young breed of music critics. Stuckists may be merely painting, but a feeling very like Punk attitude made it come into being in 1999 – it was a big ‘fuck off’ to the contemporary art world. However, there is a difference from Punk: the Stuckists believe that if issues are addressed honestly, ‘attitude’ does not, in the end, have to be controversial. How that attitude is promoted, of course, is a different matter.

Appendix

(i) The Stuckist Manifesto

THE STUCKISTS (est. 1999)

"Your paintings are stuck, you are stuck! Stuck! Stuck! Stuck!" *Tracey Emin*

Against conceptualism, hedonism and the cult of the ego-artist.

Stuckism is the quest for authenticity. By removing the mask of cleverness and admitting where we are, the Stuckist allows him/herself uncensored expression.

Painting is the medium of self-discovery. It engages the person fully with a process of action, emotion, thought and vision, revealing all of these with intimate and unforgiving breadth and detail.

Stuckism proposes a model of art which is holistic. It is a meeting of the conscious and unconscious, thought and emotion, spiritual and material, private and public. Modernism is a school of fragmentation — one aspect of art is isolated and exaggerated to detriment of the whole. This is a fundamental distortion of the human experience and perpetrates an egocentric lie.

Artists who don't paint aren't artists.

Art that has to be in a gallery to be art isn't art.

The Stuckist paints pictures because painting pictures is what matters.

The Stuckist is not mesmerised by the glittering prizes, but is wholeheartedly engaged in the process of painting. Success to the Stuckist is to get out of bed in the morning and paint.

It is the Stuckist's duty to explore his/her neurosis and innocence through the making of paintings and displaying them in public, thereby

enriching society by giving shared form to individual experience and an individual form to shared experience.

The Stuckist is not a career artist but rather an amateur (*amare*, Latin, to love) who takes risks on the canvas rather than hiding behind ready-made objects (e.g. a dead sheep). The amateur, far from being second to the professional, is at the forefront of experimentation, unencumbered by the need to be seen as infallible. Leaps of human endeavour are made by the intrepid individual, because he/she does not have to protect their status. Unlike the professional, the Stuckist is not afraid to fail.

Painting is mysterious. It creates worlds within worlds, giving access to the unseen psychological realities that we inhabit. The results are radically different from the materials employed. An existing object (e.g. a dead sheep) blocks access to the inner world and can only remain part of the physical world it inhabits, be it moorland or gallery. Ready-made art is a polemic of materialism.

Post Modernism, in its adolescent attempt to ape the clever and witty in modern art, has shown itself to be lost in a cul-de-sac of idiocy. What was once a searching and provocative process (as Dadaism) has given way to trite cleverness for commercial exploitation. The Stuckist calls for an art that is alive with all aspects of human experience; dares to communicate its ideas in primeval pigment; and possibly experiences itself as not at all clever!

Against the jingoism of Brit Art and the ego-artist. Stuckism is an international non-movement.

Stuckism is anti 'ism'. Stuckism doesn't become an 'ism' because Stuckism is not Stuckism, it is stuck!

Brit Art, in being sponsored by Saatchi, main stream conservatism and the Labour government, makes a mockery of its claim to be subversive or avant-garde.

The ego-artist's constant striving for public recognition results in a constant fear of failure. The Stuckist risks failure wilfully and mindfully by daring to transmute his/her ideas through the realms of painting. Whereas the ego-artist's fear of failure inevitably brings about an underlying self-loathing, the failures that the Stuckist encounters engage him/her in a deepening process which leads to the understanding of the futility of all striving. The Stuckist doesn't strive —

which is to avoid who and where you are — the Stuckist engages with the moment.

The Stuckist gives up the laborious task of playing games of novelty, shock and gimmick. The Stuckist neither looks backwards nor forwards but is engaged with the study of the human condition. The Stuckists champion process over cleverness, realism over abstraction, content over void, humour over wittiness and painting over smugness.

If it is the conceptualist's wish to always be clever, then it is the Stuckist's duty to always be wrong.

The Stuckist is opposed to the sterility of the white wall gallery system and calls for exhibitions to be held in homes and musty museums, with access to sofas, tables, chairs and cups of tea. The surroundings in which art is experienced (rather than viewed) should not be artificial and vacuous.

Crimes of education: instead of promoting the advancement of personal expression through appropriate art processes and thereby enriching society, the art school system has become a slick bureaucracy, whose primary motivation is financial. The Stuckists call for an open policy of admission to all art schools based on the individual's work regardless of his/her academic record, or so-called lack of it.

We further call for the policy of entrapping rich and untalented students from at home and abroad to be halted forthwith. We also demand that all college buildings be available for adult education and recreational use of the indigenous population of the respective catchment area. If a school or college is unable to offer benefits to the community it is guesting in, then it has no right to be tolerated.

Stuckism embraces all that it denounces. We only denounce that which stops at the starting point — Stuckism starts at the stopping point!

Billy Childish Charles Thomson
4.8.99

The following have been proposed to the Bureau of Inquiry for possible inclusion as Honorary Stuckists:

Katsushika Hokusai

Utagawa Hiroshige

Vincent van Gogh

Edvard Munch

Karl Schmidt-Rotluff

Max Beckman

Kurt Schwitters

(ii) The Remodernist Manifesto

Remodernism 'towards a new spirituality in art'

Through the course of the 20th century Modernism has progressively lost its way, until finally toppling into the pit of Postmodern balderdash. At this appropriate time, The Stuckists, the first Remodernist Art Group, announce the birth of Remodernism.

1. Remodernism takes the original principles of Modernism and reapplies them, highlighting vision as opposed to formalism.

2. Remodernism is inclusive rather than exclusive and welcomes artists who endeavour to know themselves and find themselves through art processes that strive to connect and include, rather than alienate and exclude. Remodernism upholds the spiritual vision of the founding fathers of Modernism and respects their bravery and integrity in facing and depicting the travails of the human soul through a new art that was no longer subservient to a religious or political dogma and which sought to give voice to the gamut of the human psyche.

3. Remodernism discards and replaces Post-Modernism because of its failure to answer or address any important issues of being a human being.

4. Remodernism embodies spiritual depth and meaning and brings to an end an age of scientific materialism, nihilism and spiritual bankruptcy.

5. We don't need more dull, boring, brainless destruction of convention, what we need is not new, but perennial. We need an art that integrates body and soul and recognises enduring and underlying principles which have sustained wisdom and insight throughout humanity's history. This is the proper function of tradition.

6. Modernism has never fulfilled its potential. It is futile to be 'post' something which has not even 'been' properly something in the first place. Remodernism is the rebirth of spiritual art.

7. Spirituality is the journey of the soul on earth. Its first principle is a declaration of intent to face the truth. Truth is what it is, regardless of what we

want it to be. Being a spiritual artist means addressing unflinchingly our projections, good and bad, the attractive and the grotesque, our strengths as well as our delusions, in order to know ourselves and thereby our true relationship with others and our connection to the divine.

8. Spiritual art is not about fairyland. It is about taking hold of the rough texture of life. It is about addressing the shadow and making friends with wild dogs. Spirituality is the awareness that everything in life is for a higher purpose.

9. Spiritual art is not religion. Spirituality is humanity's quest to understand itself and finds its symbology through the clarity and integrity of its artists.

10. The making of true art is man's desire to communicate with himself, his fellows and his God. Art that fails to address these issues is not art.

11. It should be noted that technique is dictated by, and only necessary to the extent to which it is commensurate with, the vision of the artist.

12. The Remodernist's job is to bring God back into art but not as God was before. Remodernism is not a religion, but we uphold that it is essential to regain enthusiasm (from the Greek, *en theos* to be possessed by God).

13. A true art is the visible manifestation, evidence and facilitator of the soul's journey. Spiritual art does not mean the painting of Madonnas or Buddhas. Spiritual art is the painting of things that touch the soul of the artist. Spiritual art does not often look very spiritual, it looks like everything else because spirituality includes everything.

14. Why do we need a new spirituality in art? Because connecting in a meaningful way is what makes people happy. Being understood and understanding each other makes life enjoyable and worth living.

Summary

It is quite clear to anyone of an uncluttered mental disposition that what is now put forward, quite seriously, as art by the ruling elite, is proof that a seemingly rational development of a body of ideas has gone seriously awry. The principles on which Modernism was based are sound, but the conclusions that have now been reached from it are preposterous.

We address this lack of meaning, so that a coherent art can be achieved and this imbalance redressed.

Let there be no doubt, there will be a spiritual renaissance in art because there is nowhere else for art to go. Stuckism's mandate is to initiate that spiritual renaissance now.

Billy Childish

Charles Thomson

1.3.2000

Published by The Hangman Bureau of Enquiry
11 Boundary Road, Chatham, Kent ME4 6TS

(iii) Stuckism and Punk

A Stuckist document

The first Remodernist art group
(est. 1999)

Stuckism and Punk

Helping to get art back on its feet

- 1. You are fully entitled to do something.**
- 2. Punk is right thought and right action.**
- 3. Authenticity is honesty.** It's important to be honest, and it helps the critics to find something to criticize.
- 4. 21st century punk in art is painting pictures and making sense.**
- 5. Stuckist style is in its content.** The more effort the style, the less the substance.
- 6. Fashion is bollocks.**
- 7. Punk means brilliance is possible by everyone, but not just anyone.**
- 8. Jack Vettriano is better than Jeff Koons.** Joseph Beuys, Bruce Nauman and Takashi Murakami are crap.
- 9. Punk lost its way as a London fashion in 1976,** but revived in 1977, when young boys and girls walked around small town shopping precincts wearing safety pins and razor blade necklaces. Some of them stopped doing this, when they discovered punk.
- 10. 1873 was a good year for punk.**
- 11. Damien Hirst was a punk at heart, and became a stuckist.**
- 12. Vivienne Westwood's *Active Resistance* manifesto is a pompous rehash of *The Stuckists* manifesto eight years too late.** But thanks anyway.
- 13. When bad artists grow up, they can become great artists.**
- 14. Genesis is punk.** The Book of Genesis, not the group for fucks sake.
- 15. It's worth making something that lasts longer than a week.**
- 16. Jonathan Jones is an enemy of art.**
- 17. Conceptual art is a dead end.**
- 18. Stuckists aren't stuck.**
- 19. Art comes from the soul,** which is unfortunate, as most contemporary artists don't have one.
- 20. If Leonardo da Vinci was alive today, he would paint like Bill Lewis.**

Paul Harvey and Charles Thomson
with the Stuckist Bureau of Information
1 June 2010

The following have been accepted by the Stuckist Bureau of Inquiry
for possible inclusion as Honorary Punk Stuckists:

Salvator Rosa
Thomas Gainsborough
Dante Gabriel Rossetti
Vincent van Gogh
Ernst Ludwig Kirchner
Sir Peter Blake

(iv) Czechoslovakian New Wave Film

I was first introduced to Czechoslovakian New Wave film as a degree student at North Staffordshire Polytechnic. *Valeries Week of Wonders* was one of the films shown to us. Others included *The Firemen's Ball*, directed by Milos Foreman. I have loved many of the films ever since. I decided to spend some time attempting to analyse that period of Czech film making- to see in fact if there was anything philosophically that I could link to punk and Stuckism, being as it had had such a big effect on my practice. This corresponded with my proposed trip to Prague to meet up with Robert Janás, art critic and historian, and founder of The Prague Stuckist group.

The films had been made during the period leading up to the Prague Spring and the subsequent invasion of Prague by the Soviets. Perhaps there was an anti establishment element that could be explored, or some other area that would be relevant. Luckily, or perhaps understandably, such a magnificent flowering of ideas has its followers, and there are a small number of books dedicated to it, most of them academic in nature. It must also be noted that at the time these films were being produced, they were acknowledged worldwide (*Closely Observed Trains* won an Oscar for example). One particular book, *Czech New Wave Filmmakers in Interviews* published in 2004 gave me the opportunity to read the artists' own reflections on their work, as well as discussing contemporary work. I knew from early discussions with Robert Janás that he felt the Czech Republic was suffering in a similar way to the UK in terms of the dominance of conceptually based, supposedly superficial work, and there also seemed to be disillusionment among the writers and directors

within the book about the state of contemporary Czech cinema post the Velvet Revolution. There were ideas that I could indentify with within the interviews and that I felt connected to my research. For example, Antonín Máša, director of *Looking Back*, released in 1968, says of the current Czech filmmakers:

I think that young filmmakers know the craft very well. I think they do. But if I look at them as serious authors, artists, then I believe they have nothing to say. It is just filmmaking for the sake of making films, just to do this interesting activity if someone likes it.

Compared with the 50s or 60s... the bottom line was to express something that makes a statement. Anyway, it was about saying something, being like a poet, let's say.

(Buchar, 2004, p.19)

There are no writers here to talk about themselves... if there is a film about young people, it is conventional and you can feel it's not authentic. It's not an authentic statement, or it's superficial.

(Buchar, 2004, p. 21)

Vera Chytiltová, director and writer of *Daisies* in 1966, states:

What is missing (today) is any kind of reevaluation. Nobody thinks. We are just spouting phrases because we are used to talking like that. We keep doing that and we don't even know what we are talking about. What is important is to be authentic all the time.

(Buchar, 2004, p.69)

Again the issue of authenticity crops up, alongside the need to communicate, albeit in the way a poet communicates. The spiritual nature of creativity is also

a feature of the interviews. Jiri Menzel, director of *Closely Observed Trains* states:

People prefer evil to good. Good is boring, unfortunately, and artists are not aware of the fact that they are contributing to the dehumanisation of people. ...the arts always cultivated humans, educated, guided them to some spiritual values. Including so called “cheap art”. It had a purpose. Today, it’s different.

(Buchar, 2004, p.43)

For “cheap art” we could consider Thomson’s early “crude art” philosophy as a similar concept. Zusana Zemanová, director of *The Sand Castle* elaborates on this theme:

I believe that our spiritual life is minimal. We are in a period when our priorities are focussed on how to survive, and how to get more and more money. It is a natural reaction to the flood of merchandise and all that stuff coming at us like an avalanche, and all at the expense of our thinking, self-reflection, and our spiritual life.

(Buchar, 2004, p.111)

Otakar Vávra, director of *Hammer Against Witches* in 1969, brings this issue of spirituality together with balancing the conscious and the sub conscious- a key aspect of Stuckist thinking:

Art is when an artist, creator, is reacting to a pressure from the outside world through his own internal emotions, expression, and he is able to share this expression with others. Ancient hunters knew that “share it” when they drew a bison on the wall of the cave. The drawing of the bison didn’t just resemble the real bison but he was also running, in motion, very dynamic but at the same time it was like a dream- it was an

emotion of the bison representing a God, a demon to a man who was watching him and trying to capture him. That's it. All this together- emotions processed by an artist's conscience leading to a form- that's where film becomes art. If it just represents something then it's not art, it's just a craft. That's how it is with film, life everything.

(Buchar, 2004, p.121)

Point 3 of the Stuckist manifesto states:

Stuckism proposes a model of art which is holistic. It is a meeting of the conscious and unconscious, thought and emotion, spiritual and material, private and public. Modernism is a school of fragmentation — one aspect of art is isolated and exaggerated to detriment of the whole. This is a fundamental distortion of the human experience and perpetrates an egocentric lie. (see appendix 1.1)

During the course of my research, I discovered Poetism. The original book, *Valerie's Week of Wonders*, was written by the Poetist Vítězslav Nezval in 1935. As we have seen, the core of the original Stuckists were poets, and this has had an impact on the type of work they have been producing as painters. Poetism was a Modernist movement with a manifesto, with ideas taken from a number of sources such as Constructivism and Surrealism. Marxist in philosophy, it stressed the need for man to work but also to play:

...we desire freedom for the individual. "After six days of work and building the world, on the seventh day we shall find beauty in our souls." With this quotation from O. Brezina it is possible to give a true picture of the relationship between poetism and constructivism. When a person lives as a working person, he also wants to live as a person, as a poet.

Poetism is not only the antithesis, but also the necessary fulfillment of
constructivism...

(<http://cafeirreal.alicewhittenburg.com/pmanifes.htm#summary> accessed 16.5.09)

Other areas of the manifesto again seemed to relate to areas connected to
my research. Karel Teige, the writer of the manifesto, discusses –isms:

Poetism is without a philosophical orientation. It would only confess to a practical and
tasteful eclecticism. It is not a world view -- that, for us, is Marxism -- but a part of life.
And certainly not a part of life that resides in the workroom, library or museum...

Poetism isn't a literature...

Poetism isn't a style of painting...

Poetism isn't an -ism, which is to say an -ism in the hitherto narrow sense of the
word. For today there isn't an artistic -ism. Constructivism is the method of all types of
productive work. Poetism is, in the most beautiful sense, the art of life, a modern
epicureanism. It does not bring in an esthetic which would forbid or impose...

Poetism is, above all, a *modus vivendi*. It is a function of life and, at the same time, is
its *raison d'être*...It is true that happiness is a comfortable apartment, a roof above
one's head. But it's also love, amusement, laughter and dance. Poetism is a grand
education. The excitant of life. It relieves depression, concerns, resentment. It is
spiritual and moral hygiene...

To not understand poetism is to not understand life!

(<http://cafeirreal.alicewhittenburg.com/pmanifes.htm#summary> accessed 16.5.09)

This reminded me of point 13 of the Stuckist manifesto:

Stuckism is anti 'ism'. Stuckism doesn't become an 'ism' because Stuckism is not Stuckism, it is stuck! (see appendix 1.1)

Then there is the issue of professionalism and amateurism, also discussed by Teige:

Artistic professionalism cannot survive anymore. If it is new art and that which we call POETISM (the art of life,

the art of being alive and living life),

it must ultimately be as self-evident, pleasurable and understandable as sport, love, wine and all other types of delicacies. It cannot be a mere occupation, or trade, but rather a common need. No individual life, if it is lived decently -- that is, in laughter, happiness, love and contentment -- can be without it. Professional art is a fallacy and, to a certain extent, an anomaly. For instance, at the Paris Olympiad of 1924 professional clubs were not admitted. Why, then, shouldn't we just as resolutely reject the professional fraternities of the painting, writing, and sculpting businesses? The artistic work cannot be a product for business speculation nor should it be an object of dry, academic speculation. It is fundamentally a gift, or a game without obligations or consequences.

(<http://cafeirreal.alicewhittenburg.com/pmanifes.htm#summary> accessed 16.5.09)

This is reflected in point 9 of the Stuckist manifesto:

The Stuckist is not a career artist but rather an amateur (amare, Latin, to love) who takes risks on the canvas rather than hiding behind ready-made objects (e.g. a dead sheep). The amateur, far from being second to the professional, is at the

forefront of experimentation, unencumbered by the need to be seen as infallible.

Leaps of human endeavour are made by the intrepid individual, because he/she does not have to protect their status. Unlike the professional, the Stuckist is not afraid to fail. (see appendix 1.1)

This distrust of professionalism and producing art for commercial gain is also discussed by the writer and director Sasa Gedeon in the aforementioned

Czech New Wave Filmmakers in Interviews:

But for me what is important... is to make a film that doesn't pretend to be smart.

Because some commercial films, like American films for example, are very smart but they are not wise. They are cleverly structured to look intelligent, to catch attention, to convince viewers they are not wasting their time watching it. But in reality they don't give you anything.

(Buchar, 2004, p.35)

Another director, Otakar Vávra, who directed *Hammer Against Witches* in 1969, put it very simply when he states 'Truthfulness. The truthfulness is what distinguishes a good film from a bad film. It's a simple answer, one word that says it all.' (Buchar, 2004, p.121) I also discovered that some directors had used real musicians to act the role of musicians as opposed to using actors. This I presumed was an attempt to give a more authentic representation of a musician, perhaps at the expense of a 'better' technical performance from an actor (*Audition- Talent Competition* Dir: Milos Forman, 1963). I was very interested in this idea, as it trusts in the practitioners own experiences.

A final point on Karel Teige: in 1934 he joined the Prague Surrealists, and subsequently began a series of collages, of which 400 were completed before he died. They were private works, and were an obsession based on a need to produce visual images that reflected his private passions- these included the female nude. Karel Srp, in discussing these collages, talks about Teige not 'attempting to improve their technical execution, nor to inform the public at large of their existence'. (Srp, 2001, p. 21). He also quotes Teige as saying:

It is the poet, an introvert fond of waking dreams, who is disposed to make of himself that sensitive sounding board, sound box, or ultra-sensitive film portraying what takes place within him. When a powerful cluster of associative ideas, which are brought about by the permanent wakeful activity of the unconscious (which differs from the dream), creates a spiritual image that subjugates us and forces itself upon us as an inner model, a psychological tremor which summons us and which we call inspiration, this may be likened to a state of ecstasy and enlightenment: the magnesium flash is the moment of exposure

(Srp, 2001, p. 28)



Fig 1: Karel Teige No.371 1951



Fig 2: Karel Teige No.198 1941

This relates very much, I feel, to Stuckist concerns. In other words, no one would bother putting a shark in a tank unless they had thought logically and coldly about how it could benefit them, whereas Stuckists paint because they need to. The following statements are all from the Stuckist manifesto:

Painting is the medium of self-discovery. It engages the person fully with a process of action, emotion, thought and vision, revealing all of these with intimate and unforgiving breadth and detail.

Stuckism proposes a model of art which is holistic. It is a meeting of the conscious and unconscious, thought and emotion, spiritual and material, private and public. Modernism is a school of fragmentation — one aspect of art is isolated and exaggerated to detriment of the whole. This is a fundamental distortion of the human experience and perpetrates an egocentric lie.

The Stuckist is not mesmerised by the glittering prizes, but is wholeheartedly engaged in the process of painting. Success to the Stuckist is to get out of bed in the morning and paint.

It is the Stuckist's duty to explore his/her neurosis and innocence through the making of paintings and displaying them in public, thereby enriching society by giving shared form to individual experience and an individual form to shared experience.

Painting is mysterious. It creates worlds within worlds, giving access to the unseen psychological realities that we inhabit. The results are radically different from the materials employed. An existing object (e.g. a dead sheep) blocks access to the inner world and can only remain part of the physical world it inhabits, be it moorland or gallery. Ready-made art is a polemic of materialism.

(see appendix i)



Fig 3: Peter Hames at his home in Staffordshire

I asked Peter Hames why he was so enamoured of the Czech New Wave:

I think one of things that originally attracted me, which is still significant, was precisely the variety of films that were being produced. The wide range of the kind of films, you know, and I think one of the reasons for this was when the students were at film school, they were encouraged to experiment, they were encouraged to find their own voices and not to conform to a particular pattern, and also, although many of the films from around the world were not shown publicly in Czechoslovakia, the students got to see virtually everything, because if a film was brought in, you know, to be looked at by the distributors to see if it was worth distributing, they would borrow it and show it at the film school, and so the students were constantly open to international films. So, I think in a way, it was a very sort of search for their own individual expression which allowed them to create the kinds of films they did. It was, if you like, a

search for individual expression, which gave birth to the particular qualities of those films.

There was no style to the Czech New Wave.

(v) Correspondence with Ann Bukantas of National Museums Liverpool regarding *The Stuckists Punk Victorian*

I felt it relevant, as part of this paper, to analyse how Stuckist exhibition practice is seen by curators. *The Stuckists Punk Victorian* show, being the biggest and most complex, became the main focus for analysis.



Fig 4: The Lady Lever Gallery during *The Stuckists Punk Victorian* show 2004

A large part of working as a Stuckist is that of exhibition practice. Contrary to one of the myths surrounding Stuckism, that they spend all their time demonstrating as opposed to making art, many Stuckist artists are extremely hardworking and prolific. This is reflected in the vast number of independent shows since 1999, as well as the shows curated by Thomson, which represent some of the original London artists plus a number of other more visible artists who came along later, such as myself.

2004 saw the Stuckists' largest show to date: *The Stuckists Punk Victorian*, held at the Walker Art Gallery and Lady Lever Art Gallery in Liverpool. Although relations between National Museums Liverpool and Thomson began well, as the show got closer the relationship deteriorated. Part of this was due to Thomson's wish to make it the best show he could and to represent Stuckism as it should be. Initially the show was to be co-curated by Thomson and Ann Bukantas of Liverpool museums, but relationships became strained when Thomson felt some of the plans originally agreed were not being adhered to, specifically for the overall design of the hang. John Bourne of the Welsh Stuckists was also involved and represented Thomson during the actual hang, succeeding in achieving most of what had been originally planned, namely a 'salon' style floor to ceiling design. Liverpool museums had shown a desire to work with a 'controversial' movement with strong ideas, but found it difficult to deal with Thomson. There were many problems preceding the opening, as each party wrestled for control. At the lowest point, a letter was sent to Bukantas, as well as the chief executive of Liverpool museums, signed by myself, Elsa Dax, Peter Mcardle, and Kathleen Evans (collectively known as the Stuckist advisory team) with our concerns. Thomson had been extremely disappointed by the way the Walker was handling the show, and a large number of issues were raised in the letter, which was around 3500 words long. I wanted to revisit this experience for my research, as at the time it seemed a complex and difficult situation. The Stuckists did not want to be difficult. Certainly I was desperate for the show to go ahead, not least because my work was being used to promote the show. It is likely that

Liverpool museums felt the same way, so why did the breakdown occur? Was it possible that the perception of Stuckism being iconoclastic and confrontational led to mistrust on behalf of the museum? Were they frightened? Did they show a condescending attitude?

Edward Lucie-Smith in the *Stuckist Go West* catalogue from 2006 wrote that 'Stuckism has gained so much fame from its demonstrations and media campaigns that its real purpose is in some danger of being overshadowed. That purpose is perfectly obvious – to make art, and to have it seen and discussed without preconceptions, in a perfectly normal and rational fashion.' I asked Bukantas if she could comment on this and how she viewed the relationship between the Stuckist media profile and the work itself, particularly if one considers Stuckism's PR success has resulted in the work not being viewed as objectively or sympathetically as it might have been otherwise. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, Bukantas stated that they would answer the questions as a team, so this has to be acknowledged. On this point she said that...

I would agree with ELS here: it is difficult to separate Stuckism out from its media profile, but we tried to aim at offering the opportunity to address the purpose that ELS discusses.

Thomson said to me during the course of our interviews that when Bukantas was able to see the Stuckists' paintings directly and familiarise herself with them, her appreciation, enthusiasm and understanding increased

considerably, compared perhaps with what she had expected to find and feel.

Was this true?

The same applies to working with all artworks when you engage with them as part of the process of working on an exhibition. You come to know the works better, the rationale behind them, details of the techniques, the challenges for the artists etc. I think probably the most interesting aspect was the very different career/histories/life backgrounds of the artists and how these related to them producing the work that they were producing. I felt that it was very important that this aspect was made available to our visitors through the interpretation and consistent with how we would approach giving info about artworks in our collection.

I asked her about the strengths and weaknesses artistically and conceptually of the total presentation at the Walker Art Gallery and Lady Lever Art Gallery:

The show was visually a very different type of hang for a contemporary art show and intrinsically made a statement through this that it was a different approach. It was, in effect, an installation in quite a conceptual sense. Its visual impact in this sense was a strength. However, some visitors did remark that the height of the displays meant that it was difficult to examine some of the works to the full and in that sense there was perhaps a conflict between the overall visual impact and the 'needs' of individual works, plus the ability of the audience to view them (same issues as in skied 19th century gallery

hangs). The density of the display also meant that works were visually pitched against their neighbours.

Overall it was visually cohesive; part of the notion of it as a movement, and not disparate, came out of the nature of the hang.

One approach would be to focus on a smaller group of the 'core' artists in more detail rather than to try and represent more artists with at least one work, since perhaps some of the single work artists were lost amidst the volume of works by others.

This last point is a fair one, and one which the main Stuckist artists have discussed many times. Wolf Howard for example, left the group after the Liverpool shows, citing this reason. Thomson understands this, but he enjoys giving artists an opportunity to show work that wouldn't normally get that chance, even at the expense of this kind of criticism.

Thomson suggested the title *The Stuckists Punk Victorian*, when he was struck by certain connections between Stuckist work and Victorian work he saw, while Bukantas and Thomson were in the Lady Lever Art Gallery. I remember him ringing me, excited about the title; obviously for me it was yet another vindication of my thinking at this time. He saw similarities, including a concern for social communication, figurative painting, interest in narrative and meaning, and an implicit moral or ethical subtext. I asked Bukantas what she thought of the title:

It engaged, simply, with the idea of 'attitude' and offered a good verbal bridge between the old and the new. This was highly appropriate for a Victorian gallery engaging with contemporary work. It was a clear statement that was in tune with the 'vibe' of the exhibition and implied that which was radical and different.

Bukantas was aware that the Stuckists were considered not only controversial but also deeply unpopular with many powerful figures in the art world. The Liverpool Daily Post (2.10.04) had reported 'A spokeswoman for National Museums Liverpool, who run the Walker gallery, said: "We fully expected this exhibition to be controversial and attract bad reviews from critics.' This is something that might well have proved a significant deterrent for other curators and institutions, and suggests a robust sense of independence by Liverpool Museums- either that or a desire for publicity by using a perceived controversial art movement. I asked Bukantas to explain this stance and the historical background that has led to it: to what extent was it institutional and to what extent did it embody the mindset of the city itself?

We sought diversity and wanted people to come and make their own judgments during a period (the Liverpool Biennial) when visitors are tuned in to a wide variety of contemporary art.

The Liverpool Daily Post quote from the spokeswoman went on to say 'But the show has been very popular with visitors and we have had a lot of positive

feedback from artists who have seen it. A lot of people have been very inspired by it and our visitors are our main priority.’ How did she feel about the visitor reaction, both in terms of the type of people who visited and their response to the show? How did it compare with her expectations and visitor reactions to previous and subsequent shows?

The installation nature of the show and the stylistic variety/volume of works was something that people responded well to, along with a curiosity to see the Stuckist works for themselves. It’s hard to compare it with other projects as there is so much variety in what we do with different projects being targeted at different audiences etc.

Here we see the weakness in email correspondence as opposed to face to face narrative inquiry: at this point I would have asked Bukantas why she had twice referred to the Stuckist show as an ‘installation’, when she knew that I would deny that particular description. She also saw the show as conceptual in approach. I would have asked her questions such as “when does a show of paintings become an installation? How close do paintings have to be to each other for it to change from a show of paintings to an installation? Is every show of paintings an installation? Is the National Gallery, in fact, just one big installation? Does the curator have the right to use terms that the artist doesn’t agree with for a show of their work? Are the curators putting themselves above the artists?

I asked about the visitor numbers for the show and how they compared with other shows at the Walker. Bukantas attached a sheet of figures, stating:

[the] figures have to be seen in the context of the length of each exhibition, therefore looking at the daily average overall is usually useful as a benchmark. Also, the Stuckist exhibition was in the permanent collection galleries and these figures are not counted separately [compared with those in the temporary exhibition suite] and are so based on overall footfall into the Walker Art Gallery. John Moores 23 overlapped with part of the Stuckist exhibition period as did Bill Viola, Art DIY etc.

Frank Milner, in 2004 Education Officer at NML and editor of *The Stuckists Punk Victorian* book, had told Charles Thomson that he saw the project as a "seminal" and important one with the implication that in the future the Stuckists would be more highly valued than at present in art historical terms – with the show and book thereby assuming an enhanced status. I asked Bukantas if at the time of the show did she have any such possibility in mind as a consideration, and did she see this as something that might happen?

It did not form part of our thinking in or reasons for doing the show, and such is the art world that one can not predict if this will happen or not. It was important that the show had a publication as a legacy of the project, something that we aspire to with many exhibitions and we do hope that at a variety of levels, all our art exhibitions contributed towards the knowledge and

profile of individual artists, groups, themes and movements and in the case of living artists that they enable them to progress their careers.

Sir Nicholas Serota had adopted a committed stance soon after the show when refusing the offer of paintings to the Tate, and had been unequivocal that Stuckist art is not "of sufficient quality in terms of accomplishment, innovation or originality of thought". This indicated to Thomson and myself a strong curatorial policy of deciding by certain *a priori* artistic criteria what should be made available to the public. At least Bukantas had seemed to have adopted a different policy, namely of seeing their role as enabling their viewing public to experience prominent diverse contemporary artistic directions and placing their audience in the position of passing the final judgement. I asked her if this was a fair assessment of their policy:

We wish to broaden both our audiences and the experience of our visitors. In particular we are keen to appeal to a younger audience, including, for example, teenagers and art students. We felt that the exhibition would succeed in reaching this audience, especially as part of the Biennial offer, through a combination of factors, from the history of the Stuckists through to the edginess and non-traditional nature of some of the artworks. The broad range of artists and styles helped also. We also wish to highlight the fact that, as a gallery known for its historic collections, we also show contemporary art.

As stated earlier there were some contentious issues between the Stuckists and Bukantas during the preparation of the show. Frank Milner, who was also

involved in some of these difficulties, later expressed this to Charles Thomson as a process of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, i.e. a positive statement of a resulting net benefit. I asked her if she saw the outcome as positive in their goal of representing the Stuckist movement in the most advantageous way for the benefit of museum visitors, or did she think it undermined such a goal?

The exhibition was a success and attracted wide interest. We do continue to get sporadic enquiries about it, for example from A level students; anecdotally, people occasionally say they enjoyed it.

Regarding the Stuckists, *The Observer* had reported on 11.12.05 that 'Even the Walker Gallery in Liverpool, which held a Stuckist exhibition, 'Punk Victorian', a year ago, declined to leap to their defence. 'We weren't holding their work up as something very good in terms of quality,' said a spokesman. 'It was more about stimulating a debate about what art is.'

(<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2005/dec/11/arts.artsnews1>)

Stuckist artist, John Bourne (also the Stuckist curator present during the hang of the Walker show), phoned the NML press office to query the apparent discrepancy between this and the more glowing response in the *Liverpool Daily Post* (2.10.04), as quoted above, and was told that the latter view was what the NML had emphasized to *The Observer*. Did Bukantas feel *The Observer* quote did not properly represent their position on the show? If so, what would she say to represent their position accurately? If not, could she reconcile the contradiction?

The interpretation of the quote is perhaps misleading. Its intention was to underline our reasons for proactively pursuing the project, which are hopefully underlined elsewhere in these responses.

Because of her position, I presumed that Bukantas had seen coverage of the Stuckists in both local and national media over the years since the show had ended. How did she see their progress over that time?

We have only seen occasional references and so don't really feel qualified to comment on this.

Had her experience of working with the Stuckists given her a different insight to that of colleagues or acquaintances whose only knowledge of the Stuckists is through the media? If so, what did she see that others did not from just having the media as their source of information, and what might she communicate of this understanding to others?

It is important that people should look beyond the Stuckist 'brand' and take time to look at the histories and work of the individual artists.

Finally Bukantas picked out the artists she saw as the most interesting:

Naïve John, John Bourne – high level of skill

Bill Lewis, Joe Machine – very striking visual imagery

Sexton Ming, Elsa Dax – very individualistic imagery and contrasting use of picture space.

(vi) Relevant gigs attended 1977-1981

The Stranglers, Steel Pulse, De Montfort Hall, Leicester 3.10.77

The Clash, Richard Hell & the Voidoids, The Lous Kings Hall, Derby
3.11.77

The Jam, The New Hearts, Kings Hall, Derby 25.11.77

The Boomtown Rats, Bernie Tormé, Kings Hall, Derby 1977

The Adverts, Kings Hall, Derby 9.2.78

Eddie & the Hot Rods, Radio Stars, Squeeze, Kings Hall, Derby 9.3.78

The Stranglers, Steel Pulse, Bingley Hall, Stafford 30.5.78

Buzzcocks, Victoria Hall, Hanley October 1978 (date not known)

Siouxsie and the Banshees, Spizz Oil, Human League Victoria Hall,
Hanley 25.10.78

The Skids, Russell Club, Manchester 16.11.78

The Clash, The Slits, The Innocents, Victoria Hall, Hanley 29.11.78

The Police, North Staffordshire Polytechnic 15.12.78

Elvis Costello, Richard Hell & the Voidoids, John Cooper Clarke, Victoria
Hall, Hanley 19.1.79

Penetration, Cowboys International, Victoria Hall, Hanley 20.4.79

Magazine, Simple Minds, Victoria Hall, Hanley 26.4.79

The Stranglers, Victoria Hall, Hanley 1979

The Police, The Cramps, Victoria Hall, Hanley 7.6.79

The Damned, The Ruts, Discharge, Victoria Hall, Hanley 15.6.79

Devo, Birmingham Odeon 8.10.79

Lene Lovich, Victoria Hall, Hanley 23.10.79

Penetration, Victoria Hall, Hanley 30.10.79

The Specials, Madness, The Selector, Victoria Hall, Hanley 31.10.79

The Skids, Victoria Hall, Hanley 7.11.79

The Jam, The Dickies, Patrick Fitzgerald, Manchester Apollo 12.11.79

The Jam, The Vapors, Trentham Gardens 26.11.79

Iggy Pop, Psychedelic Furs, Birmingham Odeon February 1980 (date not known)

Dexys Midnight Runners, The Black Arabs, Tiffany's, Newcastle-under-Lyme 11.2.80

The Clash, Discharge, Victoria Hall, Hanley 1.2.80

Elvis Costello, Clive Langer and the Boxes, Stychfields Hall, Stafford 27.3.80

The Jam, Victoria Hall, Hanley 4.6.80

The Comsat Angels, North Staffordshire Polytechnic 21.11.80

Siouxsie and the Banshees, Assembly Rooms, Derby 21.8.81

The Teardrop Explodes, The Thomson Twins, Keele University 6.2.81

The Stranglers, Victoria Hall, Hanley 17.2.81

Elvis Costello and The Attractions, Victoria Hall, Hanley 20.3.81

Echo & the Bunnymen, Blue Orchids, Manchester Apollo 3.5.81

The Cramps, The Meteors, Keele University 20.5.81

Kraftwerk, Free Trade Hall, Manchester 5.6.81

Iggy Pop, Manchester Apollo 4.7.81

U2, The Comsat Angels, Kings Hall, Stoke on Trent 16.10.81

The Cure, And Also The Trees, Kings Hall, Stoke on Trent 29.11.81

Dangerous Girls, North Staffordshire Polytechnic 4.12.81

(vii) “Helping to get art back on its feet” Research, performance and practice 2006 to 2011

As part of this submission, I have included the painting matrix, entitled *“Helping to get art back on its feet” 5 years of research, performance and practice*. This matrix documents the various strands of activity during this period of research, as well as relating this activity to my work as a practitioner, with the authors own assessment of said work. For ease of reference, I have listed below just the shows I took part in during this period.

Solo shows:

2006 *Dreaming of a World Without Irony* 2006, Opus Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne.

2009 *Original Doubles*, Wanted Gallery, Notting Hill, London

Group shows

2005 *“Painting Is the Medium of Yesterday”—Paul Myners CBE, Chairman of Tate Gallery, Chairman of Marks and Spencer, Chairman of Aspen Insurance, Chairman of Guardian Media, Director of Bank of England, Director of Bank of New York. A Show of Paintings by the Stuckists, as Refused by the Tate Gallery. Guaranteed 100% Free of Elephant Dung.* La Viande Gallery, Hoxton, London

2006 *Go West* Spectrum Gallery, Mayfair, London

2006 *The Triumph of Stuckism* Hope Gallery, Liverpool.

2007 *I Won't Have Sex with You as long as We're Married 'A'* Gallery, Wimbledon, London

2008 *An Antidote to the Ghastly Turner Prize View Two* Gallery, Liverpool.

2009 *The Stuckists Christmas Sale 2009* Matisonn Burgin Gallery, Phipp Street, Shoreditch, London

2009 *Vitamin PhD* University of Northumbria, Newcastle upon Tyne

2010 *Stuckist Clowns Doing Their Dirty Work* Artspace Gallery, Mayfair, London

2010 *An Antidote to the Ghastly Turner Prize View Two* Gallery 23 Mathew St Liverpool

2011 *The Enemies of Art* Lauderdale House, Highgate Hill, Waterlow Park, London

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